

The **MAST** *Journal*

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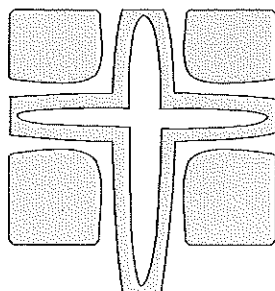
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Dear Sisters, Associates, and Friends of Mercy,

How do institutions protect the human dignity and personal rights of employees? Mercy healthcare institutions and universities have formal, objective procedures for employees to seek review of decisions by supervisors about disciplinary actions, evaluations, and promotions. In city and state agencies, the employee handbook will always have an entry, "Grievance Procedure."

In an effort to avoid litigation and settle disputes without the financial and emotional cost of trial, a growing number of U.S. courts require parties to try to reach agreement through "alternative dispute resolution." These steps are distinguished as conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. Mediators who are not involved in the dispute assist the parties in listening and "horse-trading." The point is to find a solution without having to take the dispute to a judge and jury.

To foster a spirit of good will for resolving conflicts in church settings, the Canon Law Society of America developed a grievance structure nearly twenty years ago, and sent every diocese in the U.S. a copy, modeled on the triad of conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. Diocesan chanceries and parishes thus have the CLSA model or their own procedure. (However, as some religious women and laity have discovered, the practical implementation can become something of a shell game with pastor and diocese when a minister wants to invoke it.)

When the Institute was established in 1991, it adapted the CLSA model to settle disputes without having to go to diocesan tribunals or to the Vatican. Titled the Reconciliation Process, its strategies are also outlined as conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. While not specifically mentioned in the Institute Constitutions or Directory, the Reconciliation Process was incorporated into the directories of regional communities. It was formalized by designating regional and Institute boards of Sisters to be elected by the community at large. A board's service coincides with the term of the regional leadership team. Prior to 1991, the twenty-five regional communities, with differing histories, either had or didn't have familiarity with a grievance procedure to provide vowed members an avenue for appeal of superiors' decisions.

Such a policy assumes that all members say "Yes" to two ways of acknowledging a member's personal dignity. The first is the right to appeal a decision that has aggrieved her and have its rationale and fairness carefully examined. The second is the right of a woman to defend herself when someone lodges an accusation against her. Here, she can rely on objective steps of due process to be followed by the superior. A hearing of the facts from her own point of view is guaranteed. The right of defense includes her entitlement to professional assistance by a canonical advocate or an attorney.

These provisions represent basic human rights, which in Western culture are rooted in societal ideals: the individuality of the person, truth reached by testing of claims, and consistent fairness in making decisions. Several biblical examples hint at the religious tradition supporting these values. Susanna was maliciously accused of adultery and, on the basis of the claim by respected elders, condemned to death. Her advocate Daniel voiced her right to due process: "To condemn a woman of Israel without examination and without clear evidence? Return to court, for they have testified falsely against her" (Dan 13:48). Nicodemus spoke to his fellow Pharisees about guaranteeing a person the right to speak his own truth, and advised against arresting Jesus merely because accusations were lodged against him, "Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?" (Jn 7:51). Paul, defending himself against criminal charges, invoked his right to have that religious indictment in Jerusalem reviewed by a civil court in Rome: "I appeal to Caesar" (Acts 25:11).

In light of the theme of human dignity and respect for the person, it is gratifying to note that Sister Helen Marie Burns (ILT) described the possibility of an Institute-wide educational process on rights and responsibilities of members as a context for raising awareness of how the Reconciliation Process might better serve members as a means of conflict resolution (VITA, February 2003, p. 2).



Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

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Respect for the Dignity of the Person in Catholic Social Teaching

Marilee Howard, R.S.M.

“Catholic Social Teaching” refers to a number of documents which have been issued by popes, conferences and synods of bishops, the Second Vatican Council, and others acting in an official capacity in the Catholic Church. It also refers to positions, concepts and understandings developed and affirmed in these documents. These documents represent the Church’s understanding of the application of Gospel values, relied upon more or less explicitly, in responding to various social conditions.¹

Initiation of Social Teaching in *Rerum Novarum*

Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, which is concerned with the situation of the poor, primarily workers, in industrialized countries and with the roles of the various elements of society in addressing their situation, was issued in 1891 and is generally considered the first of these teachings.² Although the principles presented were not entirely

new to Catholic thought, the manner in which they addressed the social and economic conditions of the time was an important step in initiating what is now considered the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.

Other documents in this tradition include: *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931); *Divini Redemptoris* (Pius XI); *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, (John XXIII’s, 1960’s); *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae* (Second Vatican Council, 1960’s); *Populorum Progressio* and *Octogesima Adveniens* (Paul VI); Medellín (1968) Puebla (1979) documents of the Latin American Bishops; *Justice in the World* (synod of bishops, 1971); *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI at request of synod of bishops in 1974); *Dives in Misericordia* (1980), *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Salvifici Doloris* (1984) and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1988) all by John Paul II; and pastoral letters of the U.S. Bishops, most notably those on war and peace and on the economy.

The 1971 synod of bishops gives an indication of the impor-

tance of justice in Catholic Social Teaching when it says:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.³

The documents include frequent references to justice and the demands or requirements of justice. They also frequently link justice with charity or mercy, with equity or with humanity.⁴ Justice is the principle that requires that persons be given what is their due. The dignity of the human person is the value which provides a reason to be concerned about justice. The way that human dignity is understood will serve as a basis for certain judgments about what is due persons in justice, and will help to determine certain minimal requirements of justice.

Dignity of the Human Person

One value of critical importance to understanding Catholic Social Teaching is the dignity of the human person. Its affirmation is a theme which is consis-

The dignity of the human person is the value which provides a reason to be concerned about justice.

tently present to some degree throughout Catholic Social Teaching and becomes prominent with the encyclicals of John XXIII and the work of the Second Vatican Council. Human dignity is the value these documents name to support and justify the assertion that human beings have universal and inviolable rights and duties. It serves as a basis for judging the justice of social, political, and economic practices and is a key element in the evaluation of the "signs of the times," the consideration of present circumstances in the light of faith that was called for by the Second Vatican Council.⁵ The importance of this value is apparent in *Gaudium et Spes* where a full chapter is devoted to the dignity of human persons.⁶

The Documents of John XXIII

In *Mater et Magistra* John XXIII emphasizes the importance of human dignity in the evaluation of social actions and structures. He affirms the "lofty dignity" of the life of individuals and peoples,⁷ and relates this dignity to the teaching of Christ, which embraces the whole of the human person and calls for concern for the requirements of daily life as well as for spiritual values.⁸ As a means to affirm and defend the dignity of the human person, he presents the principle that "individual men are necessarily the foundation, cause, and end of all social institutions."⁹ Human dignity serves as a measure of justice in economic activity and is to be

protected. Obstacles to it are to be avoided.¹⁰

In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII extends this concern for human dignity and life to the consideration of social and political as well as economic matters.¹¹ In this encyclical, which is addressed to "all men of good will,"¹² the bases presented for human dignity include the natural qualities of intelligence and freedom as well as Christian belief in creation, redemption, and divine destiny.¹³ Human dignity is related to the very nature of human beings as persons and is said to require recognition that the human person has a range of fundamental rights and obliga-

Fundamental human rights include rights to life, an adequate standard of living, and moral, cultural, and economic rights.

tions. Fundamental human rights include rights to life, an adequate standard of living, and moral, cultural, and economic rights.¹⁴ Obligations are closely related to rights, and both rights and obligations are universal and inviolable because of the dignity of human persons.¹⁵ This natural dignity is presented as equal for all persons, and all are equally entitled to share in the benefits of society.¹⁶ In both *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, respect for human dignity is presented as essential to the formation of human society and to justice and peace.¹⁷

The Second Vatican Council's "Joy and Hope"

Like *Pacem in Terris*, *Gaudium et Spes* is addressed "not only to the sons of the Church and all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity."¹⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* may be seen as giving full and explicit expression to the theme of human dignity that had become prominent with the works of John XXIII. The dignity of the human person is an important moving force throughout the document. The council finds the basis of human dignity in the creation of the human person in the image and likeness of God, in the ability to know and love God, in human

beings having been appointed as masters of the earth, in redemption, and in natural human qualities such as intelligence, conscience, and freedom.¹⁹ At one point in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council affirms human dignity then goes on to assert:

There must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of

one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and to rightful freedom in matters religious.²⁰

Not only must living conditions be materially adequate, they must allow the individual to be aware of his or her own dignity.²¹ Reverence for human dignity also requires a sense of unity among persons so that "everyone must consider his neighbor . . . as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to live it with dignity."²² To live with dignity may here be taken to mean that persons can live in a way in keeping with, or suitable to the dignity that is theirs as persons. All human persons share equally in human dignity in that "all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since all have the same

contemporary man. And the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom."²⁵

This increased consciousness of human dignity is affirmed as "greatly in accord with truth and justice,"²⁶ and the right of religious freedom is presented as grounded in human dignity.²⁷

Documents of Paul VI and John Paul II

Paul VI, in *Populorum Progressio*, is concerned with the worldwide development of conditions suitable to a human life. He does not make the same explicit appeals to human dignity as the measure and ground of justice that have been examined above, but the values of a fully integrated hu-

man life are evident in the goals and direction of this work. He calls for movement from conditions that are less human to those that are more human. Among less human conditions he includes:

abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions.²⁸

The same passage lists progressively more human conditions as including:

The passage from misery towards the possession of necessities, victory over social scourges, the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture . . . increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning toward the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace . . . the acknowledgement by man of supreme values, and of God their source and their finality . . . faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man, and unity in the charity of Christ, Who calls us all to share as sons in the life of the living God.²⁹

Human persons are called to responsible and creative use of freedom to develop the earth and to obtain what they need. Each is said to have a right "to find in the world what is necessary for himself."³⁰ In *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul returns to *Gaudium et Spes* in referring to the human person as "the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions,"³¹ and affirms rights and duties which should be equally shared by all.³²

John Paul II gives strong emphasis to the theme of human dignity in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* where he calls for a fundamental equality of peoples and individuals. He describes human dignity as flowing from the creation and redemption of human beings by God and from the activity of the Spirit in their lives.³³ His emphasis on the human qualities of

Human dignity also requires that persons be afforded means of participation in the social and civic affairs of life.

nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ, and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny."²³ Human dignity also requires that persons be afforded means of participation in the social and civic affairs of life.²⁴

Dignitatis Humanae also reflects the emphasis of the Council on human dignity:

A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of

man life are evident in the goals and direction of this work. He calls for movement from conditions that are less human to those that are more human. Among less human conditions he includes:

The lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essential for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness . . . oppressive social structures, whether due to the abuses of ownership or to the

work and its dignity in *Laborem Exercens* further illustrates the importance of this theme for the Church's social teaching.³⁴

U.S. Bishops Rely on Theme of Human Dignity

The bishops of the United States rely heavily on the theme of human dignity. In *Economic Justice for All* they state, "Human dignity, realized in community with others and with the whole of God's creation, is the norm against which every social institution must be measured."³⁵ Human beings, described as holy and sacred, having been created in the image of God, are ends to be served by institutions rather than means to be exploited, and human dignity is presented as one of the norms, along with a preferential option for the poor that is required to deal with poverty.³⁶

Dignity of Persons as Basis for Human Rights

The dignity of human persons is a basic value in Catholic Social Teaching. It is understood in a way that reaches across natural and supernatural aspects of human persons, asserting that they are to be valued and respected. It is also used to call attention to ways in which persons are not being adequately valued and respected and to exhort persons to work toward correcting such deficiencies. It provides the basis for claims that certain principles and the judgments involved in applying them to specific situations are required for the proper

moral ordering of society if human persons are to be respected adequately. Even where it is not given explicit or lengthy discussion, human dignity is present as a central value which supports the principles that are presented.

The dignity of human persons is used to justify claims that human beings have rights and responsibilities. The specific way it is understood in Catholic Social Teaching provides a norm against which various arrangements and structures in society are to be judged. These norms include concern for the equitable distribution of the means of material well-being as well as concern for spiritual and personal aspects of human welfare.

David Hollenbach, a professor of moral theology specializing in social ethics, was a consultant to the Ad Hoc Committee

Special Value of Persons

The dignity of the human person seems to perform three functions in Catholic Social Teaching. It asserts that human beings have a special value which must be respected. This is a value that is not limited to their usefulness or accomplishments. Nor is it limited to the concerns of this world, for it transcends any temporal or material considerations. Hollenbach refers to this when he says:

Dignity is . . . a transcendental characteristic of persons. Human persons have a worth which claims respect in every situation and in every type of activity. Dignity is the norm by which the adequacy of all forms of human behavior and all the moral principles which are formulated to guide behavior are to be judged.³⁸

Human dignity, realized in community with others and with the whole of God's creation, is the norm against which every social institution must be measured.

on Catholic Social Teaching and the United States Economy that formulated *Economic Justice for All*. He says that in the Catholic rights tradition "the reality of human dignity makes claims on others that it be recognized and respected. The moral claims set forth as human rights express the more specific content of these claims." He describes human dignity as more fundamental than any right and as the source of all moral principles.³⁷

Secondly, references to human dignity serve to draw together theological and philosophical understandings and concepts related to this value. In this way, reference can be made in one brief phrase to the various reasons that human beings are to be valued. This provides a means of exhorting Christians to undertake action in keeping with this value and of appealing to others who also believe that the dignity of human persons should be respected.

Finally, human dignity serves as a foundation for various claims as to what is required to respect the value of human persons adequately. This is a foundation that does not rely on enlightened self-interest, a social contract, or utilitarian motivations to require concern for the well-being of human persons and of society. Instead, the claim that persons have both rights and obligations is based on the way the essential character and

life. It is more a matter of a judgment of what is in keeping with or suited to the life of human beings, as beings that have the dignity of persons with all of the natural and supernatural aspects of such persons. Much as Thomas Aquinas presented the idea of the fittingness or suitability of some object to human reason or its accord or discord with reason,³⁹ knowing what is required to respect human dignity depends on judgments that are not easily de-

oneself as correlative to rights, both rights and duties are said to depend upon the same "natural law" for "their source, their sustenance and their inviolability."⁴⁰ In addition, the concern and respect for persons required by human dignity is not limited to the recognition of and respect for rights. It is much more adequately fulfilled by the sincere love and concern of persons for one another than by any narrow sense of obligations and rights.

Neither is human dignity reducible to equality, for simple equality need not express the sense of positive worth and value expressed by the concept of human dignity. Two persons who experience conditions equally inadequate to their personal development may be as equally matched as if they experienced conditions that provided equal levels of positive support adequate for their development. Concern for human dignity cannot, however, be satisfied with conditions that are simply equal if they are not also adequate, to the extent that this is possible, for persons to live decently.

Concern and respect for persons required by human dignity is not limited to the recognition of and respect for rights. It is much more adequately fulfilled by the sincere love and concern of persons for one another than by any narrow sense of

value of the person is understood. Since justice is concerned with what is due to each person, it will not be possible if the dignity of the person is not adequately respected. If respect for human dignity requires that certain material conditions be met as fully as possible, as well as respect for the liberty or autonomy of the person, then justice will also require these conditions.

Justice Preserved by Love

The specific requirements of justice, in keeping with this understanding of human dignity, however, cannot be determined in any mechanical way or by simple proposals concerning specific material conditions of a good

life. It is more a matter of a judgment of what is in keeping with or suited to the life of human beings, as beings that have the dignity of persons with all of the natural and supernatural aspects of such persons. Much as Thomas Aquinas presented the idea of the fittingness or suitability of some object to human reason or its accord or discord with reason,³⁹ knowing what is required to respect human dignity depends on judgments that are not easily de-

finer with specific criteria or clear rules. In addition to any rules or criteria that might be formulated, an element of discernment is required that is able to take account of a multitude of aspects of the relational, material, and spiritual conditions involved in a situation and grasp that human dignity is or is not being adequately respected. While human dignity serves as the basis for rights claims in Catholic Social Teaching, it is not reducible to such claims. One indication of this is that human dignity is used as the basis for the assertion of obligations to oneself, as well as to others, for which there are no correlative rights in other subjects. While *Pacem in Terris* presents duties to

Dignity Rooted in Relationship to God

It is possible to ask whether the concept of the dignity of the human person provides an adequate foundation for the claims of human rights and obligations that Catholic Social Teaching makes. In appealing to the human qualities of reason and freedom, Catholic Social Teaching uses a philosophical basis for its assertion of the value of human

persons. And yet, because it also emphasizes the social character of human persons, this foundation is not as individualistic as philosophical approaches that place primary emphasis on self-interest or individual autonomy. In addition to philosophical arguments, Catholic Social Teaching also relies upon theological beliefs that assert that human persons are related to God. Through this relationship they have a special worth and deserve respect. So, Catholic Social Teaching offers philosophical and theological arguments for the human dignity on which it bases its claims of human rights and obligations. For those who accept the theological premises, there are strong grounds for asserting the special value of human persons and the respect due them. For those who do not accept the theological premises, human reason and freedom still provide a strong philosophical basis for according human persons respect and acknowledging rights and obligations in keeping with these qualities. Claims of rights and obligations become one especially strong way of expressing what is due to human persons.



Notes

- 1 In studying official documents of the Catholic Church, one is constantly faced with references to human persons that
- are not gender neutral. I use the language of the documents in direct references, but attempt to be more inclusive in my own discussion. I ask the reader's understanding of this attempt to refer accurately to source material yet while being sensitive to the impacts of gender biased language.
- 2 When referring to the Catholic Social Teaching documents I follow the practice of abbreviating document titles with two or three letters after the first citation and citing paragraph numbers if they are given with the text.
- 3 Synod of Bishops, Second General Assembly, *Justice in the World*, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), (JW) 6.
- 4 As examples see: John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. Joseph Gremillion, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), (MM) 18, 39, 77, 161; Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, general ed. Walter M. Abbot, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), (GS) 66; JW 33; EP 77.
- 5 GS 4; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. Joseph Gremillion, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), see headings prior to 39, 75, 126. (PT will be used to refer to the publication of the text by Daughters of St. Paul, Boston, 1963, unless otherwise noted.)
- 6 GS 12-22, (part 1, chapter 1).
- 7 MM 1.
- 8 MM 23.
- 9 MM 219.
- 10 MM 83, 179.
- 11 PT 40-41, 44, 48, 73, 79, 112, 139.
- 12 PT introduction.
- 13 PT 9-10.
- 14 PT 9-27.
- 15 PT 9.
- 16 PT 89, 59.
- 17 MM 215; PT 44.
- 18 GS 2.
- 19 GS 12, 22, 14-17.
- 20 GS 26.
- 21 GS 31.
- 22 GS 27.
- 23 GS 29.
- 24 GS 31.
- 25 Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, general ed. Walter M. Abbott, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), (DH) 1.
- 26 DH 1.
- 27 DH, especially 1.
- 28 Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1967), (PP) 21.
- 29 PP 21.
- 30 PP 22.
- 31 GS 25; Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. Joseph Gremillion, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), (OA) 14.
- 32 OA 16.
- 33 John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in *Origins*, 17(38) (March 3, 1988): (SRS) 40.
- 34 John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, in *Origins* 11(15) (Sept. 24 1981): (LE) preface, 1, 4-6, 9.
- 35 EP 25.
- 36 EP 31-32, 28, 25; see also MM 219 and GS 40.
- 37 David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 90.
- 38 Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict*, 90.
- 39 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, (I-II, q 18, a 5), trans. fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 666.
- 40 PT 28. Article is adapted from: *The Relevance of Catholic Social Teaching for Determining Priorities for Rationing Health Care*, (a dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy in philosophy), © 1990, Marilee R. Howard.

Reflections on Unholy Silence

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M..

There is a mystique about silence. It is circled round with images and memories. In the first book of Kings, it is in the quiet breeze that one hears the voice of God.¹ Throughout the Scriptures, silence is the waiting place, the stance of heart and spirit most open and receptive to the movement of the Spirit in life.² It is identified with a contemplative way of being. Who has not experienced the deep inner silence evoked by “rumor of angels” moments, the beauty of a giant sequoia, the birth of a child, the passing of a loved one in death?

Silence and Non-Violence

Silence is always prelude. Sometimes it is a prelude to praise, sometimes to lament. The truth heard in the silence of our hearts calls us to respond. It is a moment when our silence can burst forth in prophetic words and deeds or that word can remain bottled up within. The truth given to us to speak is withheld from the people of God. It is then that sacred silence becomes unholy. Prophetic utterance is tamed.

The events and turmoil of this new millennium are ones that are challenging our hearts and minds. Presumed certitudes have been reduced to ashes. Trust in institutions of church and government has been shaken and, for some, transformed into suspicion, cynicism, and disillusionment. There is a natural tendency to stand silent before our reality because it is too vast and too complicate to comprehend. There is an equally strong temptation to rage against what seems immediately apparent: the unjust act, the sexual predator, the system of global economics that exploits and destroys peoples and nations. Our anger at the exploitation of persons and creation can become toxic for our spirits if it fails to flow from a nonviolent heart. It can be a rage that fails to see that it contains within itself the same

seed as the evil that provoked it. Gandhi warns us of the danger of lashing out at persons rather than behaviors.

“It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.”³

Speech as Resistance, Silence as Complicity

Confronted with a vast landscape of social injustice, it is comfortable to go for what is near, what is easily named and challenged. It is easier to focus on a catalyst event than to address and identify the underlying patterns and values from which that event springs.

The challenge of exercising our prophetic voice is not new. At every stage of history, the Christian community has wrestled with when to speak and when to remain silent. In retrospect we ask ourselves, however, how we could have condoned the violence of the Crusades, the abuses of the Inquisition. How could the Christian community be silent in the face of the on-going compromises made in the name of national alliances? Instances of genocide, ignoring human rights violations in “friendly” nations, overt and subtle racism raise questions about how prophetic voice is muted. The recent scandal of clerical sexual misconduct painfully illustrates how silence and complicity are intertwined. Issues of ecological sustainability, terror and torture as state policy, economic domination and the exploitation of those who are weak or economically poor to serve the ever-expanding appetite for more likewise call us to recommit ourselves to fulfill the mandate of

our prophetic call. To remain silent would be tantamount to embracing complicity.

Consciousness Develops over Time

An ongoing deepening of understanding about the demands of justice, of what it means to reverence the dignity of each human person has occurred over time. Practices that we find indefensible today were once found acceptable. In the early Christian world, slavery was not condemned, only the mistreatment of the one enslaved. In spite of Christian teaching on the equality and value of all children of God, nineteenth century religious conformed to the civil law and maintained segregated communities in the southern United States. In the early decades of the twentieth century, women who were battered or abused by their husbands were counseled to forgive their abusers and remain in the marriage. Civil law did not acknowledge the reality of spousal rape until recent times. These examples show us that the growth of human consciousness and self-understanding leads humankind to redefine the boundaries of what is found to be acceptable moral conduct. Principles remain constant but the application and understanding of the full implications of those principles constantly evolve.

The deepening of such consciousness does not come spontaneously or simultaneously to everyone. There is a long period of gestation and many struggles along the way. The Declaration of Independence declared all men equal but the implications of that statement had to be refined by a civil war, constitutional amendments, legal opinions and lots of voices raised saying: "Until all are equal, none are equal." Even after all that turmoil and struggle, two hundred years later, women do not enjoy full equality in practice. The refugee and undocumented are often denied basic human needs.

Like every generation, we have to struggle with the great moral questions of our day. Out of our contemplative centers, out of our silent reflection and prayer, we can begin to articulate our understanding of the moral imperatives of our times, begin to tease out the implications of social principles that have long been part of our consciousness. We can identify, analyze and challenge those practices that, though imbedded in our experience, must now be found untenable.

Reverence in Speaking for the Voiceless

To speak for the voiceless, to challenge any system or practice that violates the norms of justice is an integral part of our prophetic call, especially our prophetic call as Sisters of Mercy. Our Constitutions call us to: "... endeavor to model mercy and justice and to promote systemic change according to these ideals."⁴ This is further articulated in our Institute Direction Statement in which we call ourselves to: "act in solidarity with the economically poor of the world, especially women and children; to act in solidarity with women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society; to act in solidarity with one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality."⁵

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There is a prior demand, however. We are called to give voice to our silence because not to do so is an abandonment of our discipleship in Christ Jesus. To bring about the reign of God, it is necessary to work for justice, to reverence the dignity of each human person and to call ourselves to be what we profess to be, the human face of God's mercy in our time and place. We cannot be passive observers in our world. Our service of the people of God through acts of mercy is one of word and deed. An integral part of our witness within church and

society is the prophetic mission of calling for wholesale conversion of heart.

To act on the prophetic call is to embrace risk and personal transformation. It is a way of discipline and self-emptying. It asks of us what Gandhi called *Ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is both a refraining from overt harm to another and an internal frame of mind. "*Ahimsa* really means that you may not offend anybody, you may not harbor any uncharitable thought even in connection with those who may consider themselves to be your enemy."⁶ It means avoiding the righteousness that condemns another. Imbedded within the prophet's mission is the firm belief that the recipients of the message will embrace it and enter upon a life-giving path. We proclaim the message of justice and mercy because not to do so would be to abandon hope.

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God's Pathos in Heschel

Abraham Heschel, speaking of justice as the active process of remedying or preventing what is deemed injustice, tells us that what is foremost in the prophet's mind is not an idealized vision of the kingdom but the felt experience of oppression and corruption. "The urgency of justice was an urgency of aiding and saving the victims of oppression."⁷ In words that echo the mission of mercy, Heschel describes the calling of the prophet:

In a sense, the call of the prophet may be described as that of an advocate or champion, speaking for those who are too weak to plead their own cause. Indeed, the major activity of the prophets was interference, remonstrating about wrongs inflicted on other people, meddling in affairs which were seemingly neither their concern or their responsibility . . . The prophet is a person who is not tolerant of wrongs done to others, who resents other people's injuries. He even calls upon others to be the champion of the poor. It is to every member of Israel, not alone to the judges, that Isaiah directs his plea:

Seek justice,
Undo oppression;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

In Heschel's understanding of the prophet, there is a solidarity with the oppressed. The prophet not only feels the pain of the victim but also feels the pain of God as his or her own. Such a felt experience of the pathos of God doesn't arise from quick reactions. It arises from a constancy of presence in and to the Holy One. The prophet's warning is devoid of "an eye for an eye" mentality. It is more like a bright and piercing light that attempts to show the folly and evil of the way that oppresses. The prophets of old did not hate the ones they challenged. Actually, they cared deeply about them but they abhorred the behaviors they witnessed. They called the rulers and the people to be what God intended them to be, a holy people.⁸

Clergy Abuse and Culture of Silence

There is much in contemporary experience that calls forth a prophet's lament and exhortation. The public light has been placed on members of the clergy who have abused the very persons they were asked to shepherd. Though the number of clerical predators is small, what has been unveiled is the culture of silence that allowed such persons to maintain their public image and, sometimes, position. While the silence may have been rooted in a desire not to bring public disgrace to the Church, not to shake the faith of parishioners, or in a mistaken belief that the person could change, it was a silence that harmed the fabric of trust and truth. Practices of avoiding public trials, confidentiality agreements, and requiring those innocently accused to go along with out-of-court settlements just to escape notoriety, all work to keep the truth veiled. Seemingly a projected public image of virtue was more important than the acknowledgement of guilt and repentance.

The hierarchy is not alone in embracing a culture of silence. Families do so to avoid the shame of admitting that one or more of its members are abusive or addicted to drugs. Religious communities have done so each time a "difficult" member was moved from mission to mission. Governmental

agencies and corporations do so each time they strive to conceal mismanagement, unethical practice, or criminality in its way of doing business. The culture of silence thrives every time one possesses knowledge that a person, situation, or substance is harmful and fails to confront that truth.

"Confrontation involves challenge. We challenge something when we call it into question, when we suggest boldly that it is outmoded, out of date, or downright unjust. That's what we do when in the spirit of the Nonviolent Christ we confront the culture of violence."⁹ It is what we do when we break open the culture of unholy silence by pointing to an existing gap between our proclaimed values and our lived behaviors. It is broken open by asking the hard, uncomfortable questions that ask us take another look at our integrity of life.

Unholy Silence and Fear

Unholy silence has nothing to do with stillness of heart or holy listening to the Spirit. It has to do with fear, isolation, powerlessness, and the absence of felt solidarity with those outside my immediate circle of family, friends, and acquaintances. Fear of reprisal can silence workers who see corruption in their workplace. Fear of losing favor can mute the voice of advocacy for unpopular causes. Loss of benefactors, ministry opportunities, and public prestige can tame our prophetic energy as we look more to the possible consequences of action than to the potential benefit of social transformation.

The "taming" of prophetic speech is not limited to the major justice issues of our time. It can occur within the venues of our own gatherings when we are fearful of raising hard questions. It takes courage to ask questions about the centrality of Eucharist in Mercy life; about the quality of witness we give, about our busyness, about the nature of religious life today, about the justice of our own structures and practices. These questions are essential to ask over and over again. They are ones that take us back to our core values and understandings. They are the type of questions that lead to conversion of life. How we answer such questions defines who we are and what we stand for. If we don't live the prophetic questions ourselves, we weaken our ability to be prophetic women to the wider church and society.

The temptation to "unholy silence" is a daily one. We school ourselves for the wider mission in the day-to-day encounters we have with our co-workers, sisters, friends, and folks we meet. Each time we "speak the truth in love" to another, we grow in the ability to do so. Each time we let fear of ridicule not silence our plea for a less violent world or more just marketplace, the world is changed. To embrace such a path is to embrace our mission as advocates and prophets.

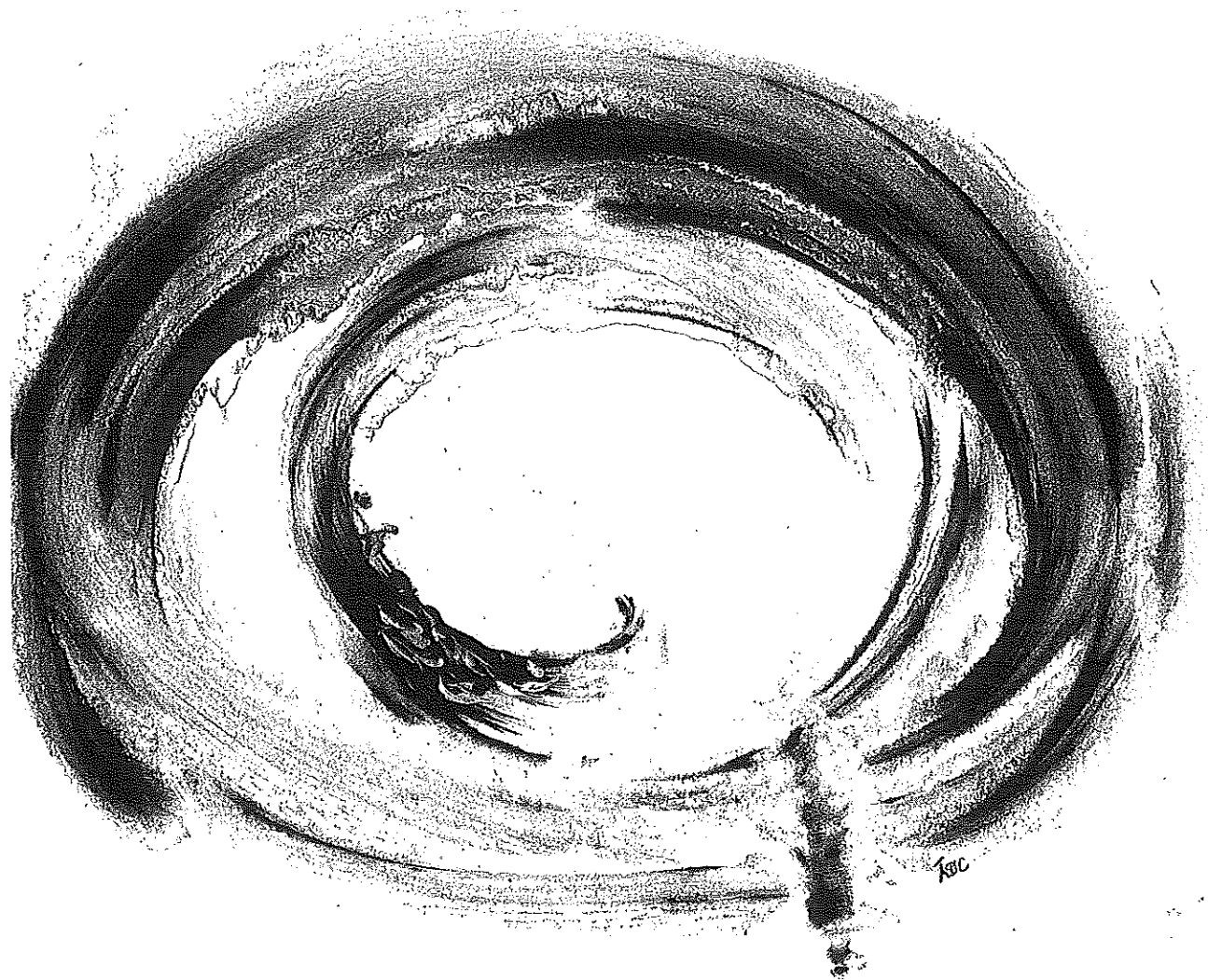
Esther Broke Silence

The scriptures provide us with a powerful paradigm for our journey in the person of Esther. She had to struggle with how to use her voice for the salvation of her people. In order for the good to prevail, she had to claim her voice, had to acknowledge that she was where she was for a reason. Mordecai put the challenge to her bluntly. "Do not suppose that, because you are in the king's palace, you are going to be the one Jew to escape. No; if you persist in remaining silent at such a time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but both you and the House of your father will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the throne for just such a time as this" (Esth 4:13-14). The same might be said of us. Perhaps we have been brought to this place, this society, this community of witnesses for "just such a time as this." Like Esther we must raise our voice and speak the prophetic message of peace and justice that all peoples might live.

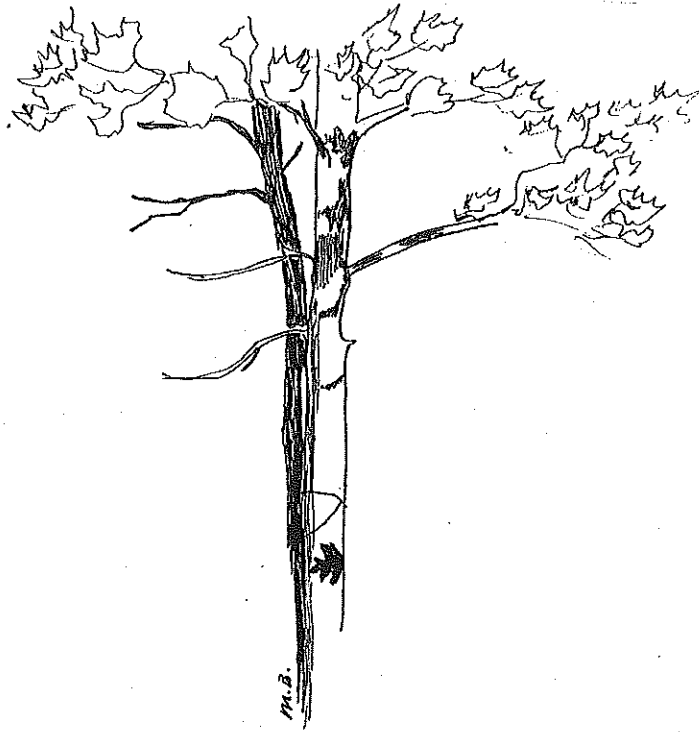


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- 1 1 Kings 19:13.
- 2 Isaiah 41:1; Hab 2:20.
- 3 Gerard A Vanderhaar, *Beyond Violence In the Spirit of the Non-Violent Christ* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998) 36.
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- 6 Vanderhaar, 13.
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- 8 Heschel. *The Prophets*, vol. 1, p. 204-205.
- 9 Vanderhaar, 90.



Hail, space for the uncontained God
From the Agathistos Hymn,
Greece, VIc



Another July
is slipping by
thistles are already
making plans for next spring.
Why the rush?

Beyond Survival Mercy and a Church in Crisis

Donna M. McKenzie, Ph.D.

I've always thought that under rape in the dictionary, it should tell the truth. It is not just forcible intercourse: rape means to inhabit and destroy everything.¹

Rape is a crime, and sexual abuse in all of its forms is an assault upon human dignity. This is something that is obvious to all of us. Yet even for people such as Alice Sebold who have been raped, there comes the gradual discovery that our experiences of evil need not provide the lens with which we view the world. There is something deeper than our shattered assumptions about the security of the world and the brokenness of institutions. Call it faith, a kind of mooring for which we have no evidence. It is like Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* where "in both stories the ship sinks, my entire family dies, and I suffer," but the story with the animals, like God, is the better story.² The story of a life with God is simply better than the story of a life without God.

This is not intended to be another expose on how terrible the sexual abuse crisis in the Church is. It goes without saying that it is terrible and that the Church is in the midst of a crisis of epic proportions, perhaps not experienced since the Reforma-

tion. Walter V. Robinson, editor of the *Boston Globe* Spotlight Team which led the reporting on the crisis and was recognized recently with a Pulitzer Prize for community service, stressed, "There is no respected institution that I can recall in my lifetime that has been as devastated as the Church has been. The impact could not have been anything other than enormous . . . given the extraordinary influence and moral authority that the Church and particularly the cardinal archbishop of Boston have long held."³

Church Structure and Teachings—Climate for Abuse?

We need to overcome the temptation to dismiss this crisis as only the tale of a few bad priests protected by ignorant bishops. Neither has the crisis been manufactured by the media. The *Boston Globe* in particular took its time before calling for the resignation of Cardinal Law. It was the *Boston Herald*, edited by a

devout Catholic, and other media who led the call for the Cardinal's resignation. It is striking, too, how many of the district attorneys investigating allegations of abuse by clergy identify themselves as Catholic. There is no time to feel threatened or attacked as a Catholic by the seemingly endless allegations of clergy sex abuse.

It is important to ask if there is something about the structure of the Church itself and the content of its sexual teachings that creates a climate in which sexual predators thrive. People's very lives and well-being depend upon this kind of analysis. Sustained reflection is needed so that we as the Church cannot just survive, but rebuild ourselves based on the story of mercy, a better story than stories of the Church without it.

Emotions Lead to Moral Truth

From the outset, I contend that an inability to tolerate the anger of those who have been op-

We need to overcome the temptation to dismiss this crisis as only the tale of a few bad priests protected by ignorant bishops.

pressed obstructs any genuine attempts to redress wrongs. As feminist theologian Sharon Welch puts it: "The self-righteous rejection of rage as a legitimate form of expression is itself a perpetuation of the cause of the rage. It is a way of denying the dignity of the peoples they have violated. Those who are victimized by their oppressors are dismissed with contempt as being overly emotional, childish, or immature."⁴ The critical role of emotions is stressed by feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who argues that emotions "contain in themselves an awareness of value or importance, they cannot, for example easily be sidelined in accounts of ethical judgement."⁵

I think the story of mercy must have something to do with the realization that, like Pi, we are all on a lifeboat where the only choice is to confront with understanding all that has the potential to destroy us,

There is no getting beyond emotions as Kant would have us do. The way to what is moral and what is just is precisely through tangled webs of emotion that like the predator animals on Pi's lifeboat have the ability to consume us. Or not. It is easier to be with people who are not angry, and a kind of etiquette has arisen among the middle and upper class that gives preference to people who express their differences with polite reserve. Or

worse yet, witness the current political climate where those who protest the war against Iraq are dismissed as un-American. Underlying this expectation is an ideology of control, an inability to allow the other to be present in all of their "other-ness."

No Peace Unless Social Sin Recognized

I think the story of mercy must have something to do with the realization that, like Pi, we are all on a lifeboat where the only choice is to confront with understanding all that has the potential to destroy us, finding ways to make peace. This is the wisdom that people who are raped rely on to move beyond being a victim

far outweighed what they could perpetrate alone.⁶ We Catholics tend to be overly optimistic about the power of grace and lack an appreciation for the sin that exists in the world. It is difficult, if not premature, to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation in this crisis without a deep understanding of sin and its hold on human hearts.

Visionary Mercy leader Emily George was fond of quoting Christopher Fry who wrote:

*Thank God our time is now
when wrong comes up
to face us everywhere
never to leave us
till we take the
longest stride of soul
man (sic) ever took.⁷*

The sexual abuse crisis presents such an opportunity for "exploration into God," during this time when "wrong comes up" in so many places in the Church itself. Those who have survived sexual abuse by its priests, bishops, and ministers are the cornerstones upon which we need to rebuild a church based on the story of mercy. What follows is an attempt to suggest three contours of a better story, the story of a church based on mercy. My hope is that these suggestions, though only brief sketches, might stimulate discussion, as well as invite further reflections on mercy and a church in crisis.

The Starting Point: The Voices of the Abused

Ann Hagan Webb, the New England Coordinator of SNAPP, explained recently to a crowd gath-

to being a survivor. This kind of peace is extremely costly and will demand from us that we abandon false assumptions about the safety of the world and the justice of its institutions and practices, even those based on religion.

We would do well to turn to Protestant ethicists such as Reinhold Niebuhr for an appreciation of social sin. Niebuhr thought that the evil that people could inflict together through their institutions and practices

ered for a solidarity march in Providence, Rhode Island:

As a child I came to this cathedral in a white dress, as the Sacred Heart School representative, to be present as my perpetrator; Anthony DeAngelis was made a monsignor. I had to bring a carnation to the altar to honor him. No one knew how he was dishonoring me.⁸

Any analysis of the crisis in the Church must begin with the voices of those who have been abused. Their anger cries out to be heard. Survivors of sex abuse by church leaders, like those who suffer from poverty, provide a perspective from which we ought to evaluate the morality of church practices and structures.

Is it any wonder that many parishioners feel that the only recourse they have is to withhold money from parish collections? Not only are the voices of survivors squelched along with the voices of concerned Catholics, but so too is a repentant pastor seeking to confess his sin.

It is almost inconceivable that the prevention of scandal and the protection of the Church as an institution took precedence over the well-being of children, as well as young men and women. Ordinary Catholics in recent months have responded with the little power they have by withholding money from diocesan capital campaigns and parishes that provide little or no fiscal accountability to the people. One suburban

parish outside of Boston where I was baptized, for example, has a weekly deficit of almost \$4,000.00. This parish, once highlighted as a progressive parish,⁹ prohibits SNAPP and Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) from meeting on church property. Both groups meet in the public library or in members' homes while at the church all three priests celebrate every Mass together as a show of solidarity for the priesthood.

A previous pastor of this church took a "surprise sabbatical" at the beginning of Lent a couple of years ago. Only recently did parishioners learn that this pastor was one of two priests in the Boston Archdio-

cese with abuse allegations levied against them by adult women. When the pastor sought to apologize to the parishioners to whom he never even had a chance to say goodbye, Bishop Lennon told him that the less said the better. The pastor courageously ignored the bishop and apologized to a group of over three hundred parishioners at the Elks Hall. The meeting, organized by SNAPP, was not permitted at the church. Neither

the current pastor nor any of the priests attended the session at the Elks.

Is it any wonder that many parishioners feel that the only recourse they have is to withhold money from parish collections? Not only are the voices of survivors squelched along with the voices of concerned Catholics, but so too is a repentant pastor seeking to confess his sin.

Courage is required to reorient the Church by living in a way consistent with the vision to which we aspire. No longer are we like sheep, but we must be brave enough to shepherd the shepherds who have wandered away from a story of mercy to a story of self-preservation. Jesuit ethicist James Keenan, for example, explains: "... the cardinal could worry more about a criminally violent priest being discovered than about the harm he caused to a ten-year-old boy or girl. Loyalty to the Vatican has been pre-eminently the standard by which our archdiocese of Boston has been governed for these past eighteen years."¹⁰ Victims of sexual abuse teach the Church that more is needed than just existing and that silence can reflect a kind of death of the soul.

Church and State Work Together

"Lawlessness in Boston," the title of an essay by William F. Buckley, aptly captures the failure of the law, including Cardinal Law, to protect the Church's most vulnerable members.¹¹ Church leaders acted and continue to act as though the laws of

the Church are above the laws of the state. Seemingly absent is Aquinas's positive view of statecraft and its ability to embody and promote the common good, meaning the sum total of societal conditions necessary for individuals to flourish as individuals. It would seem that churchcraft ought, if anything, to exceed the standards set by the state for the protection of individuals. At a minimum, church leaders are held accountable to the standards set by the state to protect and promote human dignity. The failure of the Church to hold abusers accountable to the laws of the state, inasmuch as the laws of the state protect its citizens, represents a tragic turn from its own deeply held convictions about the meaning of government and its radical possibilities for redemption.

Rape and sexual abuse are crimes and should be prosecuted as such. This has nothing to do with respecting the possibility that all human beings have to change. As Catholics we have been taught again and again to hate the sin and love the sinner. Hating the sin means recognizing it as such and holding a person accountable. As moral psychologist Sidney Callahan queries: "If abusing priests had been dosing young persons with growth-inhibiting hormones, would the priests have been so easily forgiven and secretly reassigned?"¹²

Lisa Cahill pointed out, "Catholics who have divorced and remarried, for instance, or those who are openly gay, cannot fully participate in the rites of the Church. Yet priests who have

committed a worse offense against Catholic teaching can administer those same rites. It is not necessary to agree or disagree with any particular Catholic teaching to object to the hypocrisy of the Church's position."¹³

Time after time, dioceses have tried unsuccessfully to argue that First Amendment rights justify withholding documents or providing depositions in civil suits. At the same time that the Archdiocese of Boston argued

Catholics who have divorced and remarried, for instance, or those who are openly gay, cannot fully participate in the rites of the Church. Yet priests who have committed a worse offense against Catholic teaching can administer those same rites.

that it sought to have all civil suits dismissed simply because insurers required such legal action, it hired an expensive nationally-known First Amendment lawyer, thus sending mixed messages to the victims in those suits. In a profoundly ironic turn of events and a harbinger of what is to come, the San Bernadino Diocese recently turned to civil courts to sue the Archdiocese of Boston for failing to disclose the abusing background of one of its priests. While dioceses argue that they are "above the law," they "assault" one another with that law to protect financial assets.

Recasting the story of lawlessness into one of mercy requires that we acquire a strong appreciation for the potential of civil and canon law. They ought not to be enemies. Any genuine law protects and promotes human dignity. Members of religious communities, for example, never abandon the protections afforded them by civil law and ought to gain protection through procedures for due process in canon law. While one of the bishops recently com-

mented that the Church in its design is free from politics, we need some of Niebuhr's Christian realism to assess the ways in which attention to certain kinds of politics have led us to betray our own beliefs. We would do well to remind church members of the esteem in which some of our traditional theologians held politics, as well as educate ourselves continually about the ways in which civil and canon law work together.

Sexual Pleasure as Gift

A fundamental discomfort with sex still seems to influence the

Church's sexual ethics. This, I think, contributes to an environment within the Church in which abuse thrives. Classical theologians like St. Augustine linked the sinfulness of sex to the pleasure connected with it, and argued that in paradise reproduction would occur without sexual desire. Sexual taboo undermines the ability of the Church to deal with sex in an adult way.

penalty in order to make relevant claims about how to help people, especially the poor. But Charles Curran (who was dismissed from his tenured position at Catholic University in 1987 for daring to publish a defense of contraception) has pointed out the failure of the Church to take this approach to sexual ethics.¹⁴ The Church has been fixated on the narrowest,

of nature to an appreciation of sexual pleasure as an expression of committed love will have profound implications for the priesthood, as well as the structure of the Church. No longer would those with sex lives be viewed as handicapped in their availability to God and the practice of the faith. No longer would priests or religious be regarded as superior beings simply because they took a vow of celibacy. It is vital to wrestle with Catholic sexual ethics in ways that reflect the concrete circumstances of people's lives. A prohibition against the use of condoms, for example, has contributed to the spread of AIDS, especially in Africa. It is the case that views of sex as taboo harm people and cripple the ability of the Church to overcome the conditions in which abuse thrives.

We live in a church climate that punishes those who publicly disagree with church teaching. As a result, there has been a general reluctance to speak out or publish anything on sexual ethics as it seems to be the most explosive topic of all. The story of a church based on mercy makes room for and even welcomes questioning and responsible dissent. In the Jewish heritage we share, questions and arguments themselves are ways of coming to know God. Our very survival in this world depends on how we treat those with whom we disagree.

Mercy and a Church in Crisis

I have tried to suggest that the present crisis in the Church

The Church has learned to take social and historical context seriously in its evaluation of issues like war and peace, economic justice, and the death penalty . . . But Charles Curran has pointed out the failure of the Church to take this approach to sexual ethics.

Since the Middle Ages, the Church has based its ethics on the idea of natural law, which claims that because human beings are endowed with reason, truth can be ascertained without any special revelation. The problem with the use of natural law approaches to ethics is that what is "natural" may be socially constructed. Culture and circumstances can blind people, including leaders of the Church, to what the truths present in nature are. A notorious example of this is slavery, which the Church hierarchy supported for centuries.

The Church has learned to take social and historical context seriously in its evaluation of issues like war and peace, economic justice, and the death

biological understanding of the procreative purposes of the sex organs. For this reason, the Church opposes homosexual acts and masturbation viewing them as inherently wrong, "unnatural." On the other hand, Margaret Farley has argued for taking seriously the evidence of same-sex relationships—as she puts it, "the witness that homosexuality can be a way of embodying responsible human love and sustaining Christian friendship."¹⁵ One way of restating her approach might be that what natural law demands is rooted in human commitment of which procreative acts may be one expression among many.

Turning from sexual taboo and ill-formed understandings

presents itself as an opportunity for "exploration into God" and to that end I have sketched three contours of a better story, a church based on mercy. These contours include the voices of the abused as a starting point for assessing the morality of church structures and practices; the co-operative role of church and state in promoting and protecting human dignity; and sexual pleasure as gift. In all the stories of this crisis the Church falls into disrepute, people are hurt and we are sad. But the story based on a church rooted in mercy is the better story, the only story on which to base the Church in this time of crisis.



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- 6 See, for example, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner, 1960).
- 7 Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners, a Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).
- 8 Contact the Detroit Regional Community for information on Emily George's talks and presentations. Linda Werthman, R.S.M., President, Sisters of Mercy, 29000 Eleven Mile Rd., Farmington Hills, MI 48336 or werthmal@trinity-health.org.
- 8 Anne Hagan Webb, The Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) New England Coordinator, Speech for Providence, RI Solidarity March, March 16, 2003. See http://www.survivorsnetwork.org/Survivors_voices/AnnWebb_Providence.htm.
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Confronting the Culture of Resentment

A Story

Avis Clendenen and Troy Martin

The names Lucy and Paul are significant for the fictitious characters in the story. In 1949, Sister Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., President of St. Mary's College, insisted that the time had come to provide baccalaureate degrees and appropriate theological education for women religious serving in the educational ministry. The name she chose for her ideally educated Sister was Lucy Young. Over half a century later, women seeking to serve in ecclesial ministry still face special challenges. The present article explores one such challenge and names the fictitious female character Sister Lucy to emphasize the continuity of women's struggle for full dignity and recognition with men. This article names the fictitious ordained male character Paul because the Apostles Peter and Paul legitimate an ordained male clergy. Paul, however, rather than Peter, who had a wife and children, exemplifies the special prerogatives of a celibate clergy. The names Lucy and Paul, therefore, carry symbolic meaning in the story.

Paul and Lucy met in the 1970s in a progressive Catholic graduate school of ministry. Paul was a seminarian in his final three years before ordination to the priesthood. Few Catholic schools accepted women into Master of Divinity programs at that time, so Lucy, a young woman religious, was elated when she received word of her acceptance into the divinity school.¹ During their twenties, Paul and Lucy were filled with the spirit of experimentation and openness that marked the early years following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Shaped by the 1960s and coming of age in the 1970s, they felt called to respond to “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” of the pilgrim people of God (*Gaudium et Spes*, #1).² It was a profoundly optimistic time when youthful idealism matched the energy of reform sparked by Pope John XXIII's *aggiornamento*. Lucy and Paul shared a sense of daring and duty.

Women and Men Earn M.Div. Degrees

They also experienced the painful realizations that come when one call is publicly affirmed and celebrated and the other ignored. The modern women's ordination movement was born in this era and led to painful moments shared by both women

and men who together found themselves speaking of a new reality that would acknowledge and affirm the mutual support in study and ministry that men and women share together. The following prayer would be offered at Paul's diaconal liturgy: “We pray for those who will be ordained today that God's spirit may be set free within them for the ministry given them through the laying on of hands. We also pray for those who, having tested their call in the community, are not yet permitted to offer themselves to the bishop for ratification of their call.” Although recognizing the present reality, this prayer expressed the optimism of a time when everyone's call to ministry would be publicly affirmed and celebrated.

The early years following the Second Vatican Council were a profoundly optimistic time when youthful idealism matched the energy of reform sparked by Pope John XXIII's *aggiornamento*.

The complete text for Paul's diaconal liturgy in which Lucy and other women were to participate was sent to the bishop's office months prior to the ordination, and the bishop returned the ceremonial script to the school's rector a few days before the 1977 ordination. Lucy's name was deleted from the program—actually cut from the text. Streams of light came through the numerous holes left from the precise excision of Lucy's name and female presence from the liturgy. Lucy's experience of censure mitigated her ability to share Paul's joy at his ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood. The presence of women in various ministries of worship was to be a sign of the common journey of men and women and an expression of hope for a church striving to embrace the full humanity of women and to recognize mutuality in ministerial roles. However, the new reality did not materialize.

Separate Ministries of Ordained Men, Unordained Women

Paul struggled to affirm Lucy's gifts and his commitment to partnership in ministry. Their relationship deepened through the conflict. They took seriously the post-conciliar vision of the Church as the *ecclesia reformanda*, the Church always seeking conversion. They found shared meaning in living the tension between the prophetic possibilities and the status quo. He would be part of a new priesthood where her gifts would be respected. She

The presence of women in various ministries of worship was to be a sign of the common journey of men and women and an expression of hope for a church striving to embrace the full humanity of women and to recognize mutuality in ministerial roles. However, the new reality did not materialize.

The following data reflects the changing face of pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church in the United States (Statistics are from *The Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests on the Pastoral Ministry*):

1960:

- ▶ 41,000 young men were in major seminaries across the United States. Women were prohibited admission to Master of Divinity degree programs in Roman Catholic graduate schools.
- ▶ Limited number of lay students in graduate ministry programs.

2000:

- ▶ 3,300 men are preparing for priestly ministry.
- ▶ Over 30,000 lay women and men attend Catholic graduate schools of theology and ministry in preparation for vocational service in the Church.
- ▶ 32,500 lay ministers (61 percent women) serve with 33,000 active priests.

2010:

- ▶ Deacon couples and lay ministers will serve in an estimated 86 percent of U. S. dioceses.

would stand with him and make visible collaborative ministry within the structures of the Church. They believed it only a matter of time before the ontological and ecclesial discrimination between men and women would be dissolved in the practice of the church they loved. The new Father Paul was sent to a parish in the southwest. With a freshly minted M.Div., Lucy found a position in youth ministry at a Catholic secondary school for girls in a large city. They said their good-byes uncertain of the future but convinced that the creative liturgy

celebrated and songs sung in the 1970s would fuel them forever.

Like all human beings who live life as a journey filled with the unexpected, Paul and Lucy suffered the blows of disappointments, loneliness, and times of vocational confusion. Nevertheless, both were blessed with rich ministerial lives and a company of persons with whom to share their vision and values. They corresponded throughout the 1980s and continued to be a source of nurture and support for one another. Early on, they were fortunate to come to the awareness that their ministerial power rested on their individual and relational integrity and maturity. They knew it was appropriate for the people of God to hold public ministers accountable for being who they claim to be. At times their feelings forced them to the edge of boundaries and taught them that the power of human hungers can be satisfied in interpersonal intimacy without complete sexual expression. Their relationship was a near occasion of grace. They knew that understanding and experiencing the contours of human intimacy was not an optional knowledge for the ministerial life. Prudence and not paranoia guided the development of their relationship over time, distance, and new depths of friendship. Of course, open, honest, and loving friendships within their respective religious communities lured them away from secrecy by both encouraging and challenging the relationship over the years.

During the first five years of their shared ministry, they jokingly reminded one another that they wanted to know the “joys and hopes, grief and anxieties” of God’s people . . . only they hoped for more of the former and less of the latter!

Shared Male-Female Parish Leadership

In 1990 when Paul was asked to accept a pastorate as the sole priest in the same city as Lucy, it seemed only natural that he would invite her to leave the educational ministry and join him as a pastoral associate. Their friendship and mutual respect was the firm foundation to finally realize together the collaborative ministry they dreamed of nearly twenty years earlier. Now mature in the experience of ministry—idealism tempered by realism—they agreed to embark upon the venture of pastoral leadership and care in a diverse and often contentious urban Catholic parish.

During the first five years of their shared ministry, they jokingly reminded one another that they wanted to know the “joys and hopes, grief and anxieties” of God’s people . . . only they hoped for more of the former and less of the latter! They experienced the satisfaction that comes with the uncompromising commitment to empower lay leadership, open up the ministries of the parish, create meaningful liturgy, and be present with people in times of sorrow, suffering, and hope. It was exhausting and exhilarating.

So, when Paul announced that a newly ordained priest would be joining the community as associate pastor, Lucy initially greeted the news with Paul’s same enthusiasm. He first told Lucy the news before announcing it to the larger pastoral staff. Lucy enjoyed this level of intimacy with Paul; she felt she was really a copastor with him. More often than not, he affirmed her feelings by the mutual manner that marked their administrative and ministerial styles.

Lucy’s first hint of discomfort arose during the meeting in which Paul announced that twenty-eight-year-old Todd would be arriving shortly after his ordination in the spring. Paul wanted everyone on staff to update their position descriptions so that he could see how to make room for Todd’s ministry. Paul was visibly excited to have a fellow priest with whom to share both sacramental responsibilities and life in the parish house. It was hard for Lucy not to want Paul to have some relief from the almost constant request for Eucharistic liturgies, baptisms, weddings, and funerals.³ The parish community still preferred Paul to the loving and committed deacon couple. In addition, Todd was a fellow religious

with whom Paul could enjoy a brother companion lacking in his current assignment.

No Ritual to Install Lay Women Ministers

Lucy knew these things in her head but had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach when Paul spoke of rearranging office space and planning for Todd's installation as associate pastor. Lucy had repeatedly asked Paul to work with her in designing a ritual for lay commissioning. It was the one piece of lay empowerment that Paul overlooked. Lucy received no formal and communal ministerial commissioning for her ministry. The other members of the pastoral staff—the long-term elementary school principal, the full-time director of religious education, the half-time youth minister, and the pastoral care coordinator—all served without formal recognition as pastoral ministers. All were women except the permanent deacon. While committed to shared leadership, Paul shied away from drawing too much attention to ritualizing lay ministry for fear that it might appear as a form of pseudo-ordination and lead to canonical problems. Lucy thought his position was reactionary and uncreative but accepted his decision because he was so interpersonally affirming of each member of the pastoral staff.

Nonetheless, Lucy found Paul's preoccupation with Todd's ritual and celebrative welcome to be emotionally overwhelming. She could not help but recall how her excitement at joining Paul five years earlier was dampened by the massive concelebrated liturgy of installation for a new pastor. At this liturgy, Paul invited her to prepare and deliver the prayers of the faithful and even asked her, much to the chagrin of the bishop, to come forward from the assembly for the final blessing. That was it. The notice in the parish bulletin included her name as the new pastoral associate, and she was featured at the reception following Paul's installation as pastor, but few noticed Sister Lucy in their eagerness to greet Father Paul. She was skilled at recognizing the pain that accompanied this diminishment, but had learned to compensate and keep her eye on the larger picture. It hurt twenty years ago when Paul was ordained; it hurt twenty years later when he was installed as pastor. She could now feel a fresh resentment rising up in her without permission as

she listened to the plans for Todd's incorporation into and validation by the community.

While committed to shared leadership, Paul shied away from drawing too much attention to ritualizing lay ministry for fear that it might appear as a form of pseudo-ordination and lead to canonical problems. Lucy thought his position was reactionary and uncreative but accepted his decision because he was so interpersonally affirming of each member of the pastoral staff.

Acknowledging Resentment and Fractures

Lucy felt internal pressure to overcome her building resentment so as not to sour the significance of the forthcoming occasion. How and what could she share with Paul about her feelings without dredging up old wounds that he could not salve? Lucy could feel the fissure deepening between her and Paul but felt powerless from preventing its inevitable eruption. Why could he not see that the celebration around Todd, who had yet to spend two minutes with a member of the community, had a momentum that overshadowed those who had committed years of service to the community? Paul was oblivious, and she could sense that she was participating in a culture of resentment that would greet an unsuspecting new young priest in the first season of his priesthood, disorient him, and hinder his effectiveness. She knew she must confront the fracture in the flow of her relationship with Paul.

Lucy realized that her disappointment and resentment were strong enough to damage or even

destroy her long and satisfying relationship with Paul. She was familiar with the subtle, yet insidious, simmering of resentment. She recognized the chilling discomfort that sets in like a cold north wind and stiffens the climate between people. In an effort to recover the warmth between them, she tried to exonerate him by reasoning that his enthusiasm for Todd's arrival arose from his anticipation of relief from heavy sacramental responsibilities rather than any intended oversight of her or the other women on the lay pastoral staff. Lucy worked hard to suppress the resentment and to maintain an uneasy equilibrium by exempting Paul from any culpability. Initially, she experienced some success with this strategy, but Paul's unbridled enthusiasm for Todd's arrival and continued insensitivity sabotaged her attempts at exoneration. Whether intentional or not, Paul was wounding her deeply. At one time, he was so conscious about the inequities between women and men in ministry. Her disappointment and resentment now reached such a crescendo that she knew she had to do something. But what?

Lucy worked hard to suppress the resentment and to maintain an uneasy equilibrium by exempting Paul from any culpability. Initially, she experienced some success with this strategy, but Paul's unbridled enthusiasm for Todd's arrival and continued insensitivity sabotaged her attempts at exoneration. Whether intentional or not, Paul was wounding her deeply.

Forgiveness Through Confrontation

One evening as Lucy sat in her office, she noticed a book on her shelf that someone had given her several months previously. She had planned to read it many times, but the interruptions of parish ministry had prevented her until now. At this moment, she felt drawn to the book's title *Forgiveness: Finding Freedom through Reconciliation*.⁴ She pulled the book from the shelf, opened it, and curiously her eyes seized on the words of Jesus, "If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (NAB; Matt 18:15). Instead of finding the exclusive biblical language offensive, she was surprisingly drawn in by the words "brother" and "between you and him alone."

Intrigued, Lucy continued reading and discovered that instead of recommending immediate forgiveness of the offender or exoneration and denial of the offense, Jesus recommended confrontation as the initial response to an offense. The book explained that forgiveness without confrontation demands enormous amounts of psychic energy to hold feelings of forgiveness in place but requires from the offender no effort to modify or even recognize hurtful attitudes and behaviors. Lucy agreed completely with these words. Her own individual efforts to handle the deepening rupture in her relationship with Paul had drained her energies but done nothing to axe the icy resentment building within her or to alter Paul's continued insensitivity. Perhaps, confrontation was the direction Lucy needed.

Lucy felt dread at the prospect of actually confronting Paul. As close as their relationship had been, she was reticent to point out what he might perceive as a severe failure on his part. After all these years, who was she to judge him so harshly? Wasn't he still breathing life into the valley of dry bones of the priesthood? She was fearful lest he dismiss her feelings as an "old story" and shame her for not celebrating a *young* man's willingness to serve God's people with them. She worried over the perceptions of the other members of the pastoral staff if her resentment should erupt into anger and obvious bitterness toward Paul. Lucy recognized that most people avoid direct confrontation like the plague. As she pondered her dilemma, Lucy decided that her relationship with Paul was worth the risk. She would confront him.

Accurate Empathic Action

Returning to her book, Lucy read into the early hours one morning and gained new insights into the confrontation process. She learned that confrontation could be understood as *accurate empathic action*. Being *accurate* required her to understand clearly and to state precisely the nature of Paul's offensive attitudes and behaviors. Instead of generalizing or inflating his offense out of proportion to the actual events, she needed to place his behavior in the context of their relationship and establish boundaries for addressing and resolving their specific relational dilemma.

Lucy had to honestly and carefully explore the precise nature of the fracture in the flow of caring and trust between them. She had to name and own the full range of her emotions associated with the fracture and with Paul. As Lucy understood the intense power of her painful emotions, she worked into and through her resentment and relinquished any desire for revenge, retribution, or retaliation. Usually, she would have resisted any ownership of such ugly desires toward others, especially those for whom she carried warm feelings.

She knew it was her responsibility not to accelerate the situation and turn it into an occasion to discharge on Paul the ache and anguish she felt from every ecclesial event that caused her to feel minimized and marginalized. She began to understand that to effectively confront Paul, she had to make the restoration of their relationship at this specific time her driving concern. In confronting, she had to communicate to him the enormous value their relationship held for her and trust that he would really hear her.

Empathy and Struggle Against Cynicism

Continuing to explore the meaning of confrontation as *accurate empathic action*, Lucy learned that being *empathic* meant that she needed to think through the impact her confrontation might have on Paul. How would he respond to her revealing her painful emotions and identifying his attitudes and actions as the cause? Would he be surprised? Defensive? Would he be exhausted by her struggle during a time of his energetic joy? Based on her knowledge of him, she needed to create an optimal interpersonal

climate for him to hear and understand her. She needed to insure in her confrontation that she gave him space to respond rather than making him feel cornered, accused, or trapped.

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What was the response she desired from him? As she thought about his situation, she realized once again that she could not hold him solely responsible for so many seemingly endless and unhealed institutional realities. Lucy remembered the day that while reading a book by theologian Dorothee Soelle, she discovered the line, "We are responsible for the house which we did not build but in which we live."⁵ She remembered the hours of table talk that she and Paul shared as they claimed Solle's insight as a new motto of sorts. She knew how hard Paul fought off a cynicism that seems to infect those of us sharing the inside workings of life in the Church today. She struggled to convince herself one more time to resist cynicism along with its hopelessness and feelings of homelessness.

Todd would indeed arrive as an ordained, officially sanctioned minister, and she may indeed be displaced (at least for a time). Paul could not change the realities of the situation, but he could be more sensitive and more direct in his recognition of the important contributions not only of her own ministry but also of the other members of the pastoral team. If Paul could change his understanding of the emotional and ministerial consequences she was experiencing, his new sensitivities would do much to alleviate her distress and the chasm

growing between them. Lucy felt she could then forgive him and relinquish her feelings of disappointment in him and of resentment over Todd's celebrated arrival.

Action Following Empathic Identification

After accurately identifying the depth and scope of her own feelings arising from the fracture and empathetically relating to Paul's perspective, Lucy was ready to *act*. She decided to confront Paul on Monday morning in the conference room of the parish house. She knew that this was Paul's most relaxed time following the busy activities of the weekend. She also knew that this room symbolized their relationship. Not only had they "endured" many contentious staff meetings in this room, they had also prayed together and enjoyed many conversations at table. It was a place where they both felt secure and were not likely to be interrupted.

Paul sat stunned. He had no idea Lucy had been feeling this way. He struggled. His initial inclination was to defend his actions . . . Lucy read his face and feelings, and . . . her calm demeanor and her sincere request for help lowered his defenses.

Monday morning came, and Lucy invited Paul to the conference room for coffee talk. As they sat chatting about the events of the weekend, Lucy initiated the confrontation. She began, "Paul, I treasure the relationship you and I have shared since our days in theology." Paul quickly and quizzically responded, "Me, too." Encouraged by his affirmation, Lucy continued, "I'm wondering if you realize how your careful and elaborate preparations for Todd might affect those of us who have devoted our lives to ministry here while Todd has yet to spend

two minutes in this parish?" She vibrated with a depth of emotion that spilled out through her words. Lucy wanted to mention Paul's failure to design a ritual for lay commissioning but she refrained. The book had warned against diluting the confrontation with related issues that might make Paul defensive.

She stayed focused on the immediate issues between them. "I completely understand your excitement over another priest's arriving to assist with the heavy demands of this parish, but I need you to know that I have felt a strain in our relationship since the day you announced that Todd was coming. I have struggled with feelings of disappointment and resentment as I have watched your taking such pains to recognize his place in our community and among us. I want to welcome Todd and see him succeed, but I worry about his arrival into what feels like a culture of resentment. I need your help, Paul. Is it possible for you to imagine what this is like for me?" At this point, Lucy offered a small, pained smile while Paul looked serious and wearied. Lucy proceeded, "Have you noticed at all, Paul, that your level of enthusiasm has not been matched by me or the others?"

Response to the Disclosure

Paul sat stunned. He had no idea Lucy had been feeling this way. He struggled. His initial inclination was to defend his actions by enumerating the overwhelming responsibilities he carried and how it was natural for him to eagerly anticipate and celebrate the gift of a brother priest. Paul wanted to vent that she of all people ought to understand what Todd's coming would mean to him—to them—in providing some relief from the growing demands upon baby boomer ministers in need of a wave of youthful vigor. Lucy read his face and feelings, and before he could respond, she said, "I know you are surprised that I have harbored these feelings. Believe me, I have tried to eliminate them, but I cannot resolve this impasse on my own. I really need your help, Paul." Her calm demeanor and her sincere request for help lowered his defenses as he struggled to meet her and find the right words to say.

At last, he responded, "I had no idea you felt this way, Lucy, and I regret that I have been an

occasion for wounding you where it hurts you the most. I never had any intention of hurting you this way." Lucy interrupted, "I know, but I had to say this aloud and directly to you precisely because I value our relationship, and I absolutely hate the chill of resentment settling over us and potentially our community. Were our situations reversed, I would have wanted to know what you were feeling." "Yes, knowing is better in the long run than not knowing," Paul replied, wanting to believe it.

Achieving an Inclusive Perspective

They parted company and avoided one another for several days. Lucy felt better but was apprehensive. What had the confrontation done to their relationship? She realized they could not act as if nothing had happened and return to the relationship as it was before. They had enjoyed a flow in one another's company for years without needing to negotiate such a serious disruption in their relationship until now.

After what seemed like an eternity but was only a very uncomfortable week, Paul quickly took the lead and dispelled the uneasiness Lucy felt by saying, "Thank you, Lucy, for caring and believing in me enough to speak with me on Monday. I know that must have been hard for you." "It was," she admitted. Paul continued, "I have thought about what you said. I have been overly attentive with respect to Todd's coming and have not been as sensitive to you and the others as I should have been. I have been working on something the past few days, and I want you to take a look at it." "What is it?" Lucy asked. "It's a ritual for lay commissioning," Paul answered, "and I want you to help me integrate this commissioning into the events of Todd's arrival so we can celebrate and affirm the diverse and abundant gifts of ministry in our parish."

Now, Lucy was stunned and asked, "Will we get into trouble for doing something like this directly connected to Todd's installation?" Paul answered, "Why don't we have a three-day event with all sorts of enrichment and worship opportunities on the theme of discipleship and service?" Lucy felt a renewed flow of creative energies springing up between them again and said, "Thanks, Paul, thank you for choosing not to be depressed by the old

story and for listening with both your heart and your head. It takes a tenacious and tender spirit to make shared ministry work. You have it, my friend, and for that, and for you, I am grateful." Instead of damaging the relationship, confrontation had provided both of them with an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to their relationship and the high esteem in which they held one another.

Three Strategies to Preserve a Caring Context

Lucy implemented several strategies that gave her confrontation optimal opportunity for success. First, she was careful to place her confrontation in the caring context of the history of their mutually satisfying relationship. Her motivation was the restoration of that relationship rather than revenge for her wounds. Second, Lucy engaged in adequate interior preparation for the confrontation itself. She countered any internal desire to alleviate her pain at the expense of Paul's feelings. She accepted responsibility to be immediate and proactive with Paul to avoid secretly holding resentment toward Todd and setting up her own victimization by his arrival. She accurately comprehended the fracture so that she could communicate specific descriptive statements of her feelings rather than judgmental statements about Paul's motives or actions. She empathetically considered Paul's situation so she could communicate the specific information he really needed to know, and she wisely refrained from unloading on Paul every frustration she ever felt toward him or the Church universal.

Third, she chose the best time and most favorable context for Paul to receive her confrontation and not the easiest time and place for her. She measured her internal climate—mind and heart, intel-

Lucy implemented several strategies that gave her confrontation optimal opportunity for success.

lect and emotions—to determine the moment for confrontation. Finally, she focused her confrontation on what Paul was doing and how he was doing it—in the here and now—that was causing her problems. She described his actions rather than attacking his character. She did not ask him to explain his actions as though he were on trial, and neither did she patronize him as though he were an inadequate child. She communicated her feelings, thoughts, information, and alternatives from her point of view and left it to Paul to make a response to her effort at an accurate, empathic description of the problem.⁶ In the end, maturity tends to breed more maturity.

Preserving Unity amidst Ministerial Struggle

Even though the names of the characters change, Lucy and Paul's story is played over and over again in parish ministry each time the culture of resentment fails to be acknowledged and effectively confronted. The "quiet revolution" of the changing face of the Church's ministry requires the exercise of the deeply human and graced capacities for courage, compassion, and confrontation as we move into a new future together.⁷

All involved in ministry struggle to negotiate institutional realities that inevitably do, at times, divide and separate. This story suggests that one response to the relational dilemmas and conflicts women and men will invariably face in shared ministry is to develop the courageous and compassionate virtue of confrontation—as an interpersonal art form and pastoral strategy. Denying painful feelings or settling for the uneasy peace of exoneration or resignation may become increasingly dangerous, for such decisions breed the culture of resentment that marks and mars the experience of authentic mutuality in ministry. Jesus' words advocating confrontation that Lucy read in her book that night summon those who have ears to hear, "If he listens to you, you have won your brother."⁸ The prize is found as Piercy says, in the Sabbath of mutual respect.⁹ This is created when brothers and sisters strive for *accurate empathic action* for the sake of God's "kin-dom"¹⁰

"The kingdom of God looks like this: it looks like missing the mark and having to apologize; it looks like resisting and continuing power games and institutional stasis. It is only in the larger narratives, in the patient and revolutionary commitment to be human together despite all the warts, that we forge what Ada Maria Isasi Diaz has so aptly termed 'the kin-dom of God.'"

Notes

- 1 Wolff, Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C. *The Education of Sister Lucy: A Symposium on Teacher Education and Teacher Training* (Holy Cross, IN: Saint Mary's College, 1948).
- 2 Vatican II Documents
- 3 National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests on the Pastoral Ministry* (Washington, DC: NCCB, 2000).
- 4 Avis Clendenen and Troy Martin, *Forgiveness: Finding Freedom through Reconciliation* (New York: Crossroad, 2002).
- 5 Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).
- 6 David Augsburg, *Caring Enough to Confront*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973.
- 7 Donald Senior, "The Quiet Revolution: The Changing Face of the Church's Ministry." A Presentation at Saint Xavier University, Chicago (December 7, 2000).
- 8 NAB, Matt 18:15.
- 9 Marge Piercy, *Circles on the Water* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982) 270–272.
- 10 Isasi-Diaz quoted in Susan Thistlethwaite, *Beyond Theological Tourism*. (New York: Orbis, 1994) 15.



Respect in the Midst of Diversity

How Catholic Health Care Expresses Its Values

Patricia Talone, R.S.M.

The term “respect” means different things to different people. Most health care organizations rank it high in their list of core values, yet many health care professionals disagree about how exactly they might demonstrate respect to coworkers, patients, and patients’ families. Catholic health facilities, called by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops in their 2001, *Ethical and Religious Directives* to be a “community of respect . . .”¹ bear a specific responsibility to insure that members of their respective communities both proffer and experience respect. United States health care institutions today, as never before in their history, face challenges and new opportunities because they function in a multicultural, pluralistic society.

This article focuses not on multiculturalism *per se*, but upon the respect due to each individual within the aegis of Catholic health care. It examines the reality of these challenges, particularly as they highlight ethical differences between patients and caregivers and among various caregivers themselves. It articulates principles which arise from fundamental moral and ethical values. Finally, it proposes approaching each patient utilizing a narrative approach in order to

learn about and respect each individual’s uniqueness.

To Intervene or Let a Burn Victim Die

An actual case study best expresses the challenge described. A mid-west Catholic hospital offers excellent intensive care to patients drawn from a vast geographic area. In fact many persons from the rural heartland are flown to this facility to receive care. One such patient was a man in his early forties, (whom we will call John) who had been rushed to the burn unit of the hospital because he had first degree burns on over 70 percent of his body. The physicians and nurses in the burn unit quickly assessed his condition, noting that, despite the extent of his burns, his heart was strong. They believed that quick, aggressive treatment might eventually restore him to health and they immediately began aggressive, life-saving treatment. After John’s family members made the late-night, long, and arduous drive from their remote farm, they arrived at the hospital and were aghast that their son and brother was now on a ventilator and scheduled for several surgeries. They insisted that all care stop and that he be “allowed to die.”

The lead physician in John’s case was a seasoned man, originally from the Middle East. A skilled technician, he had a reputation for excellent care, obsessive attention to detail, and a demanding nature. He was not above raising his voice, a ploy he obviously deemed necessary to compensate for his shortness of stature. John’s family, however quiet and humble, remained unmoved at the doctor’s display of intelligence and emotion. Finally, the nurse-manager requested an ethics consultation to try to resolve what seemed like an impasse between doctor and family.

Doctor’s Plan or Family’s Choice

I was privileged to be one of four ethics team members called in on John’s case, together with a chaplain, physician, and social worker. As we entered the consulting room, the animosity was almost palpable between the family and the physician with hospital staff. John’s family, while very simply, even poorly dressed, were formidable. His widowed mother was accompanied by her daughter and three sons—all of whom appeared to be over 6’ 4”, wearing overalls, cowboy boots and glowering countenances. The sons said very little, allowing their mother

and sister to do most of the speaking. It was clear that they were offended, rather than impressed, with the physician's extensive credentials, the medical statistics he offered, and the accounts of numerous success stories of men and women in John's age cohort.

After an introductory dance of "I know more than you do," from the attending physician and one rather ebullient staff member, my pastoral care colleague deftly moved the group to the true business at hand. "Now that we have reviewed John's medical condition," he said, "it would be most important to us that you tell us just who John is. Who is he to you, as son and brother? What was his life like before he experienced this terrible accident? What were the things that he enjoyed the most? What did he value or treasure?" The daughter began to put together the pieces of the puzzle first, but gradually her mother and even John's taciturn brothers brought forth precious vignettes that helped all present understand not just the burn victim, but the man.

A Mother's Story of Her Son

John's life could be characterized as troubled at best. Beset by unnamed demons, he had a history of drug and alcohol abuse which began in his teens. Several years before, he had been involved in a horrific automobile accident and recovered only after months of extensive rehabilitation. His mother, at tremendous sacrifice to herself and the family, had gone to a distant city

to support him in this process, taking a job as a waitress to pay for her stay at an inexpensive and sleazy motel. After six months, she was able to bring him back to the farm where he engaged himself in very simple tasks. In her words, he never "recovered" from the auto accident

medication, and comfort, while refusing interventions that would be intrusive and, to him and his family, extraordinary. John died four days later.

Several cultural clashes were at play in this encounter. Poor, rural, uneducated middle-America met cosmopolitan Middle East

Many challenges face Catholic health care because of shifting cultural milieus. In the past ten years there have been rapid changes in demographics in the United States. Approximately 20 million Americans now count a language other than English as their primary language.

and did not have the "strength" to face months of rehabilitation for his burns. "He has suffered enough in life," she said. "God gave him a second chance, and we are grateful for that, but I don't think that my boy can do this again. I don't want to be the one that makes him suffer even more than he already has."

The mother presented John's story in a simple, direct manner. Her account was unembellished and did not ask for or expect sympathy. She told it in short, direct sentences. Pulling herself to her full height of about 5' 3", her eye contact and demeanor demanded attention. She finally got the respect and audience that she deserved. The group, both the burn unit staff and the ethics consult team, heard her plea and story. They were able to arrive at a compromise that afforded John the maximum of medical care, pain

doctor, and erudite and skilled staff ready to offer expensive medical treatment. There were also differences of faith perspectives. The physician was Muslim, the patient and family could be described loosely as evangelical Protestants, the chaplain and other staff members were either Catholic or mainline Protestant. All came to the table with specific cultures, values, convictions, and beliefs that they treasured. All expected that their persons and opinions would be respected. John's story is unique, but the situation it engendered is played out again and again in hospitals across this country.

Cultural Changes and Impact on Health Care

Many challenges face Catholic health care because of shifting cultural milieus. In the past ten years there have been rapid

changes in demographics in the United States. Approximately 20 million Americans now count a language other than English as their primary language. Asian and Pacific Islanders have the highest percentage of Americans who are foreign born. New York City, long a model for the rest of the country, has over 50 percent persons of color; it is literally a league of nations. In Montgomery County, Maryland, just outside our nation's capital, seven out of ten new residents come from countries outside the United States.² The richness of these heritages is, naturally, brought to bear in decisions about healthcare treatment and in healthcare providers themselves who bring their own ethnic, cultural, and religious richness to patient care.

What do we mean by the term "culture?" It is a broad concept that refers to shared attitudes, patterns of behavior and social mores of a group of people. It is not simply ethnicity, although that reality is brought to bear upon culture.³ Cultural diversity pertains to the differences within a population.

Again, an example might help to illustrate the delicacy of cultural reality. A health care neighborhood center in a Midwestern city delivers primary care to Bosnian refugees, displaced from their war-torn homeland. The patients, over 90 percent of whom are Muslim, bear not only the ordinary challenges of health, but many suffer from posttraumatic stress syndrome. The Catholic health service has done its utmost to at-

tend to a panoply of needs of these special patients by offering various social services, such as pre- and postnatal care of women patients and taxi service for the elderly.

Gypsy Woman from Bosnia

One woman patient did not seem to respond to either the medical treatment or the psychological help she received. The translator noticed that the patient sat apart from others in the waiting room and did not engage in conversation with any of her fellow Bosnians. After very sensitive questioning, the translator learned that the woman was not only Bosnian, but was a Gypsy. She had been placed in the city by Immigration and Naturalization Services and she suffered deeply from separation from her fellow Gypsies. A Christian, she was unable to identify with other refugees who, while sharing the same homeland, did not share her culture. It was only after the translator and social worker were able to elicit, listen to and respect her story, that they could move on to their commitment to help her healing process. Eventually, they assisted in her relocation to a part of the country where others of her culture had settled.

Quite often several cultures may function within a single health care organization. One Minnesota nursing home situated in an old, ethnically German-American neighborhood, for example, has staff that come almost entirely from East Africa. Language and cultural barriers

can prevent both the elderly and the staff from understanding and respecting one another. Thankfully, this nursing home has an extensive organizational development program aimed at orienting both residents and staff to their differences while at the same time celebrating both those things they hold in common.

Institutional Medical Subculture

In addition to the diversity of patients and staff, most acute care facilities (hospitals) have a vibrant, but often unacknowledged, medical subculture as well.⁴ This is sometimes, unfortunately, characterized by cultural arrogance expressing itself differently in different locales and institutions. Sometimes one can witness this in the way that physicians act and are treated. It may be evident in the space accorded to the medical staff, or the way that administrators communicate information to certain persons, and withhold it from others. Sometimes two different subcultures (for example, physician and nursing staff, or physician and Native American staff) may work in tandem. At other times they may be at odds.

Such differences can affect medical care and ethical response to patients. Caregivers must sometimes exert greater sensitivity to overcome tensions in the subculture, and insure that utmost respect is accorded to each patient. Some examples of these ethical issues occur in the area of patient autonomy, clinical autonomy, and informed consent.

Patient Autonomy, Clinical Autonomy, Informed Consent

For the most part, Americans recognize that the competent, adult patient is the primary locus of medical decision making. Facilities have policies and procedures in place to insure this patient right. However, cultural differences may challenge this well-accepted commitment. Many female Hispanic patients, particularly those not born in this country, may feel unable to make a medical treatment decision without a husband's consent. This can cause challenges for physicians who generally speak to an adult patient alone about his or her medical condition.

While most Americans treasure the opportunity to make treatment decisions, sometimes even without family consultation, many individuals of Asian background would never decide something that affects life and health before gathering the entire extended family and involving them in the process. Physicians and nurses often find this practice intrusive and resent the extra time and effort needed to communicate with a larger group. To those trained within a Western culture, such practices seem disrespectful of the patient's individual autonomy. How does one even approach patients and families who have these customs? The respectful caregiver first speaks with the patient, asking him or her whom they like present for the medical discussion.

Patients are not the only ones who must exert autonomy. Physicians, nurses, and other

health professionals, especially in emergency or intensive care settings must often exercise clinical autonomy, always on behalf of the best interests of the patient. It is not uncommon in the clinical setting to witness a female physician from a *machismo* culture who has great difficulty challenging an Anglo male patient about the most clinically acceptable mode of treatment. Similarly, one sometimes sees male and female physicians recommending the best course of treatment, only to be delayed or stymied by the patient's family, healer, or clergy person. In these situations, the physician retains the obligation to recommend the treatment course that she or he believes is in the patient's best interests, while at the same time recognizing that the patient may not heed her advice.

differences or difficulties, the giving and obtaining of true informed consent can be quite thorny. Furthermore, there are some persons, submissive by personality or culture, who would never question a medical professional, even when doing so might add clarity and understanding for both caregiver and patient.

The ethical principles one can utilize to address these challenges reflect fundamental values of respect and are readily translatable by any person of good will. They rest upon a recognition of the dignity of the patient as an individual and as a member of a community. Human dignity is a universal value, arising both from our essential human nature and from the vision of faith because we are created by God in God's image. God created us as social beings, in relation to one another; therefore, the good

The ethical principles one can utilize to address these challenges reflect fundamental values of respect and are readily translatable by any person of good will.

Respect Expressed in Listening to Narrative

The issue of informed consent can be thorny in the best of settings. Individuals who are sick, upset, or afraid frequently don't hear or understand what the medical professional says about the individual's diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment options. When one overlays this acknowledged challenge with language

of one is always interrelated with the good of the whole.

Respect for the patient accords each individual special regard and esteem. It involves the act of giving particular attention to the other. Rooted in the Latin *respectus*, it literally means the act of looking back or regarding. What this means is that the caregiver goes to extra lengths to understand just who this patient is,

not just in the here-and-now clinical setting, but as an individual person.

One method of insuring respect for the other is by taking a narrative approach. This method approaches each patient as an individual, realizing that he or she comes to the hospital, office or clinic with a particular sacred history that often has a profound effect upon his or her health and well-being. Patients' exercise their decision-making capacity, elicit information for informed consent and share truths or withhold confidences, often depending upon these sacred stories.

Such a methodology should not surprise any Christian because we recall that Jesus taught in parables, told stories to illustrate greater truths, and was able to elicit information from (at first) unwilling confidantes like the woman at the well (Jn 4:1-42). Caregivers need to evoke, solicit, and listen to patient's stories. One must listen always for the story beneath the story to reveal what is truly happening.

When approaching a patient, one must realize that this person is not a "Latina" or a "Hmung" but an individual with a unique history and story.⁵ A narrative approach demands that one be prepared to ask skillful and well-directed questions. Like my chaplain friend who deftly drew out John's story, one might inquire, "Tell me about Mary. We only know her since she has been in ICU, but who is she? What does she hold dear? What causes her joy? What causes her sadness? What does she believe?" Sometimes the

narrative must extend beyond the patient to the family's experience. One might ask, "When was the last time your family experienced a serious illness or death?" This question often reveals not only stories of the family's history but their religious beliefs, values, and convictions as well.

Tracy and Political History of Cambodia

Again, a case study illustrates this point. Tracy was a young, twenty-four-year-old Cambodian-American woman. A college graduate, Tracy worked for a Fortune 500 company, and contributed to the support of her family while still living at home. When she was hospitalized with a particularly virulent pneumonia, Tracy's parents would not leave her bedside. The patient showed by her expression and tone that she was exasperated by her parents and did not want them present when the physician spoke with her. The physician, feeling pressure both from Tracy and from her parents sought the help of a social worker, who managed, very creatively, to speak with the patient alone.

The social worker asked Tracy to tell her own story. How old was she when she came to this country? Why did she believe that her parents were so protective of her? When the social worker learned that Tracy's parents were survivors of the Pol Pot regime and had lost virtually all of their relatives during this tragic time, she tried to guide the young woman to appreciate her parents'

concerns, while at the same time, learning to set her own boundaries with them. She likewise spoke with Tracy's parents to try to explain that their daughter needed more of the privacy which she had learned in their new culture. Speaking and reflecting upon Tracy's (and her family's) sacred history helped to show respect for their heritage and to foster deeper understanding among them.

Expressing Respect for Cultural Differences

If Catholic health care is truly a community that provides care to those in need, this demands that those offering health care work together, widen the circles of their communities to include experts beyond their own walls or systems. There are some practical ways that facilities can express respect even in the midst of challenging multicultural realities.

First, one must take the time to elicit and listen to patient stories. Although physicians and registered nurses experience extreme time pressures, others within the facility can assist in this process. Chaplains, social workers, and patient representatives serve as invaluable assets precisely because they have the skills and time to draw out these narratives.

Pay attention to nonverbal signals as well. John's brothers sat with their arms crossed, their eyes averted and their feet tapping. One did not need a Ph.D. in clinical psychology to realize that they were extremely uncomfortable, agitated, and angry.

When they witnessed that their mother received the gentle respect that she so rightly deserved, one could see them relaxing as their jitters quieted, they made eye contact and they finally started to speak, revealing much about their brother's life and condition.

Don't assume anything. Just because a woman is Bosnian and has lived through the horrors of the war in Yugoslavia, she may not necessarily share the same religion, interests, or community of her fellow Bosnians. Take time to learn about her; invite her self-revelation.

Develop and use your own internal resources, including staff and employees. Often it is difficult, challenging, and expensive to obtain a translator from a local college or university. Work closely with your human resource department to learn which employees speak another language. Train these individuals to stand in as translators when necessary; they often know and understand medical language better than their more well-educated professional translators.

Share resources with other health care organizations as well. Often leaders within certain communities can assist not only with translation, but with explaining why a Hmung family must remain with the sick person, even in ICU, or why the some Asian groups desire to place stones or coins upon the one who is ill. Basic teaching about different cultures helps health care givers to be more accepting and respectful of these differences.

Celebrate the diversity of your organization in word, deed, and ritual. Assist the nutrition department to focus on a different culture each week by preparing and offering delicacies from different countries and cultures. Prepare signage, displays, videos, and dramatic presentations that highlight the richness of the cultures of your organization.

Each of these steps, taken separately, is only a piecemeal approach to a seismic shift in the composition of both patients and caregivers within our Catholic health facilities. However, a thoughtful, broad-based initiative goes a long way in expressing the respect and reverence owed to each individual, most especially at a time when he or she is vulnerable, alone and often afraid.

Conclusion

To stand at the bedside of a sick or dying person is to be invited into a sacred space. Like Moses, we must remove our shoes, bow our heads, and recognize that God is present (Ex 3:5). Karl Barth, among the greatest of theologians of the twentieth century, described this religious experience from his own reality. A Swiss-born, German-speaking man, exiled by the Nazi regime from Germany immediately prior to World War II because of his outspoken critique of the Third Reich, he poignantly described respect. He asked: "But what does respect for life mean? We have spoken

of astonishment, humility, awe, modesty, circumspection and carefulness . . . What matters is not something but someone, the real man [sic] before God and among his fellows, his individual psychological existence, his movement in time, his freedom, his orientation on God and solidarity with others. What matters is that everyone should treat his existence and that of every other human being with respect. For it belongs to God."⁶ Barth captures the beauty and reality of the challenge Catholic health care faces and must continually address.



Notes

- 1 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 2001. Directive #1.
- 2 Statistics from National Multi-Cultural Institute, Washington, D.C.
- 3 Roy L. Simpson. "Cultural Diversity in the Information Age." *Nursing Administration Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 83-86.
- 4 Jorge A. Garcia and Jann L. Murry-Garcia. "Culture Clash." *Archives of Internal Medicine*, vol. 159, no. 12, June 28, 1999.
- 5 M. K. Canales and B. J. Bowers. "Expanding Conceptualizations of Culturally Competent Care." *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. October, 2001:102-111.
- 6 Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, translated by A. T. Mackay et al (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961) 336-43.

The Dignity of Maternal Love

Jayme M. Hennessy

The prolific artistic tradition of the Madonna and the depictions of the various activities ascribed to Mary's motherhood, (Mary the Mother of Mercy, Our Mother of Sorrows) all testify to the intensity and intimacy of the visceral bonds of love that unite a mother to her child. I refer to these as images of *rahamim*, the Hebrew word translated as "loving-kindness and mercy." Images of the tender love and mercy of a mother for the child of her womb have an enduring place within the iconography of the Catholic tradition. The generation of life, the tenderness of a mother for her child and the mother's role of nurturing, of providing her child with food from her own body, are maternal roles that overlap with the redeeming work of God's mercy enfleshed in Jesus.¹ Although, this imagery of nurturing is generally associated with the female sex, some artists have transposed these powerful symbols into their depiction of Jesus to represent the visceral fullness of God's *rahamim* revealed in the Incarnation.

The following collection of images explores the various interpretations of *rahamim* depicted in Marian imagery and in the maternal images of Jesus. The consistent element in these images, which depicts the re-membling of mercy, is the embrace of the other; an embrace that nurtures, comforts, or protects the vulnerable other. The images selected for this section all exemplify this embrace: the medieval image of the Mother of Mercy who protects humanity from suffering; the *Pieta* and *Mater Dolorosa* and the embrace of suffering; and finally the life-giving and nurturing embrace found in the image of the Madonna. While these images represent the various characteristics of *rahamim*, they are united by its emphasis on the visceral relations that forever bind the mother to care for and love the child of her womb, whom she will never abandon.

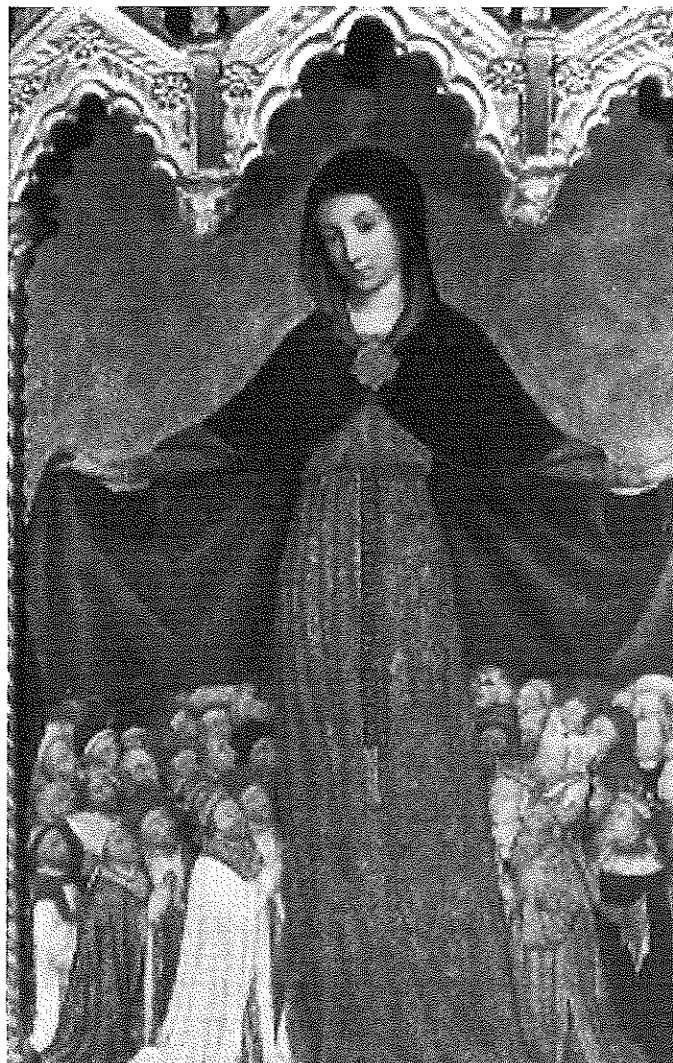


Figure 19 *Mater Misericordia*, Jean Mirhalet, 1442

Mother of Mercy: The Protecting Embrace

Medieval devotions regarded Mary as the Mother of Mercy who offered her protection and comfort to all who sought her intercession. As the human mother of God, Mary was recognized as an effective mediator of divine mercy who protected sinners

from the judgment of her divine son. All of the feminine qualities of mercy, its tenderness, its nurturing care, and its visceral connection to another, are symbolized in the motherhood of Mary and her protection and consolation of her children, whom she has gathered under her ample cloak of mercy. In Mirhalet's painting we see that rich and poor, clergy, religious and noble alike are all covered by God's mercy.² Mary is the Mother of Mercy, because through her, God's mercy, Jesus, has become enfleshed in the world.

The depiction of Mary in figure 20 records the shift in theology where Mary is regarded not as mediator but as comediator of mercy. Here, in this image, she does not gather people under her cloak for protection, but rather makes Jesus present in the world.



Figure 20 *Each Time I Think of You*, John Swanson, 1986

***Pieta* and *Mater Dolorosa*: The Embrace of Suffering**

The sculptures of the *Pieta* and images of the *Mater Dolorosa* have proven, over time, to exercise a strong affect on the viewer, thus stirring and developing the emotions of compassion, empathy and mercy within the viewer's heart. These images depict the re-remembering activity of mercy in embracing the suffering of an other person. In directing the viewer to the tightly focused renderings of the mother's suffering, the imagery of the *Pieta* and *Mater Dolorosa* aim to engage the viewer's emotions in response to the mother's pain. The images, therefore, can become a means of cultivating the feelings of mercy, compassion, and sympathy that dispose a person to merciful action.

Explicit in the *Pieta* and implicit in the *Madre Dolorosa* is the relationship of the mother to her son. In both the sculpture and paintings, particular attention is directed to Mary's deep attachment and fidelity to Jesus, as evidenced in her tender embrace and refusal to abandon him to suffering. In her fidelity, love and embrace of pain, Mary serves as a model of the activity of re-remembering, and challenges us to be open to the suffering of others, to offer comfort and relief and never to forget the other, by refusing to abandon a person to suffering and alienation.

Joanna E. Ziegler, in *Sculptures of Compassion*, notes the affective intent of this imagery. The subject of the sculpture is the figure of Mary, whose body generally dwarfs the figure of Christ laid out upon her lap. Her left hand extends over the body of Jesus, directing the viewer's gaze to the wound in the side of Jesus' lifeless body, while large tears stream down her grieving face. The intent of the image is to elicit compassion and sympathy for



Figure 21 *Pieta*, Anonymous, 15th century

suffering, to join Mary affectively in grieving for the loss of her son.³ Popular from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the imagery of the *Pieta* has enduring relevance and continues through the centuries to move people to compassion for the suffering of others. One can imagine its poignancy and significance for those mothers (and fathers too) who joined these images in grieving over the loss of a son or a daughter. Moreover, their location within churches physically created a space for suffering, acknowledging and bringing human brokenness and pain into the locus of the liturgy and Eucharistic celebration.

The *Madre de los Desparacidos*, unlike the *pieta*, has no broken body to cradle—all she can clutch at is the crown of thorns that mark the torture and death of her son. This icon represents the courage and sufferings of the mothers who refuse to forget their sons and defiantly keep vigil to protest the actions and legitimacy of governments and military organizations that brutalize and kill their own people.

The comments of artist Robert Lentz on the inspiration behind this icon reinforce the observations of Jon Sobrino regarding the anti-mercy present in the world:

This icon presents a new *Madre Dolorosa*, who stands in solidarity with the Disappeared. She wears their white kerchief, and her wine colored Byzantine garment is almost black. She has no photographs to carry of her son, who was also abducted and tortured to death, but she carries his crown of thorns . . . The white handprint smeared across the side of the icon is the signature of death squads. [Who violate] icons of God every time they abduct and torture a human being.⁴

It shows that mercy and anti mercy are real. Let mercy be reduced to sentiments or sheer works of mercy and anti-mercy will be tolerant enough. But let it be raised to the status of a principle, and the and the Sabbath subordinated to the extirpation of suffering, and anti-mercy will react. Tragically, Jesus is sentenced to death for practicing mercy. Mercy, then, is precisely the mercy that materializes in spite of and in opposition to anti-mercy.⁵

The intensity of the visceral bonds of mercy represented in the images testifies to the maternal love and fidelity of *rahamim*, which not only draws a person into solidarity with suffering of an other, but also moves him or her to relieve the suffering of an other.



Figure 22 *Madre de Los Desparacidos*, Robert Lentz, 1992

The intent of Lentz's icon is to expand affectively the horizon of the viewer's concern to remember the sufferings inflicted upon people by political and economic injustice. In giving a face to the sufferings of the oppressed in Central and South America, Lentz hopes to move the viewer to re-membering, to shake off the forgetfulness of apathy, to bring these sufferings into the horizon of one's concerns and to then act for the relief of the sufferer.

The Madonna: The Nurturing Embrace

The word *Madonna* has traditionally evoked images of nurturing mothers and serene infants. Today, it competes with the image of a popular musician who, it seems, has deliberately set out to subvert and then possess the term as her personal trademark. Compound that dilemma with the mixed message that our culture broadcasts to women about motherhood. One rarely encounters maternal imagery in the era of the working woman, and you wonder about the contemporary relevance of Madonna

imagery. That stated, the Madonna has traditionally been viewed as a powerful representation of the nurturing and dependence of the mother-child relationship. It portrays the generative, tender, and nurturing love of a mother for her child, as well as the dependence of the child upon the mother. Within the religious tradition, it establishes the humanity and vulnerability of the God become flesh, emphasizing that Jesus was born of a human mother and thus shares in the vulnerability of the human flesh. The following works testify to the wide appeal of the Madonna and represent Asian, Native American, and Caribbean interpretations of the image. The re-membling of mercy is consistently present in these representations of *rahamim*, the intense bonds that exist between the mother and the child of her womb, a relation that exemplifies the viscosity and maternal qualities of God's mercy, as revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

The Madonna Lactans, represents the nurturing power of a woman's body and the child's desire for and utter dependency upon the body and love of the mother. This imagery is transposed onto



Figure 23 *Madonna Humilias*, G.E. Mulan, 1996



Figure 24 *Asian Madonna*, Nguyen Hop Thi, 1992

some images of Jesus by the artists who exemplify the mercy of Jesus by constructing parallels between the life-giving body of the mother and the life-giving body of Jesus. The mother who nurtures her child with the milk of her breasts is paralleled by the image of Christ nurturing souls or the Church with the blood from his side. In *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Caroline Bynum reports that during the medieval period, breast milk and blood were believed to be two related forms of nourishing fluids produced by a woman's body. The mother's blood that feeds the fetus in her womb later transforms into milk for her nursing infant.⁶ Such a belief aided the transposition of the Madonna Lactans imagery onto the body of Christ.

The following image is one of many works that focuses the viewer's attention on the life-giving blood that flows from Jesus' side. The location of his side wound has shifted to his breast, which in



Figure 25 *Madonna and Child of St. Lucia*
Malaika Favorite, 1993



Figure 26 *Madonna Lactans*, Leonardo da Vinci, 1490s

the following image he offers in consolation to St. Catherine rewarding her for her work with the sick.

Such images of Jesus borrow the characteristics of the maternal female body in establishing the new life generated by Jesus' physical sacrifice and the nurturing of the soul through his wounds. The strong sense of the life-giving maternal body represented in these images reveals the culture's understanding of the viscosity of God's mercy as enfleshed in Jesus Christ. Caroline Bynum observes that these images are depictions of a new sense of God:

[M]aternal imagery is a part of a new sense of God, which stresses his creative power, his love and his presence in the flesh and blood of the Eucharist . . . breasts and nurturing are more frequent images than conceiving or giving birth. And where birth and the womb are dominant metaphors, the mother is described as one who conceives and carries the child in her womb, not as one who ejects the child into the world, suffering pain and



Figure 27 *Saint Catherine of Siena*, M. Fiorioni, 1597

possibly death in order to give life. Conceiving and giving birth, like suckling, are thus images primarily of return to, union with or dependence upon God, not images of Christ's sacrifice or of human alienation.⁷



Figure 28 *Resurrection, Cookham*, Stanley Spencer, 1924–26

This new sense of God is rooted in the experience of God's *rahamim*, the tender love of a mother for her child that becomes the model for Christian relations.⁸

This new model of love and tenderness is evident in the spiritual writings of Julian of Norwich, whose emphasis of God's mercy found its best expression in the image of Christ as Mother

So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she who is mother of our Savior is mother of all who are saved in our Savior; and our Savior is our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come.⁹

In these writings and images, the tradition develops a strong sense of the physicality of redemption. It is not only souls that are saved for eternal life, but bodies and temporal life are nurtured and sustained by the God whose mercy brings new life into the world. These maternal images depicting Jesus' loving and generative embrace of humanity complement the paternal images of divine judgment and direct attention to the needs of the world.

It is this vision of the maternal tenderness of God that inspires Stanley Spencer's vision of the Last Judgment and Resurrection of the Dead. His paint-



Figure 29 *Resurrection, Cookham*, Stanley Spencer, 1924–26 (detail)

ing, *Resurrection, Cookham* emphasizes joy and tenderness over any fear of judgment and retribution.

In the accompanying detail, one can see the rather large maternal figure of Christ comfortably seated in a chair. The figure standing behind Christ's chair is the crucified Jesus or God, the Father.¹⁰ Spencer's treatment of the resurrection attends more to the concepts of awakening and reunion as opposed to judgment. In addition, there is an overall sense of joy and tenderness as friends, family and lovers are finally awakened and reunited.¹¹ In her comments on Spencer's work, Susan Avery-Quash notes the tenderness that animates this judgment scene along with the sense of regeneration symbolized by the depiction of Jesus as Mother:

Although in the painting Spencer associates the Resurrection event with the Last Judgment and the meting out of just desserts, he does not portray Christ as a threatening judge but rather as a loving and merciful maternal figure, who nurses two babies cozily in his arms. Nor does he show much suffering; he reduces the punishment of the wicked to a mild rebuke, which seems to be going on in one or two of the graves.¹²

In its vision, this resurrection scene is similar to the concept of the Mother of Mercy, although there is no cloak under which the mother can gather her children. Instead, people are awakened by and to the tender mercy of God revealed in the image of the enthroned mother, who embraces, nurtures, and comforts her children.

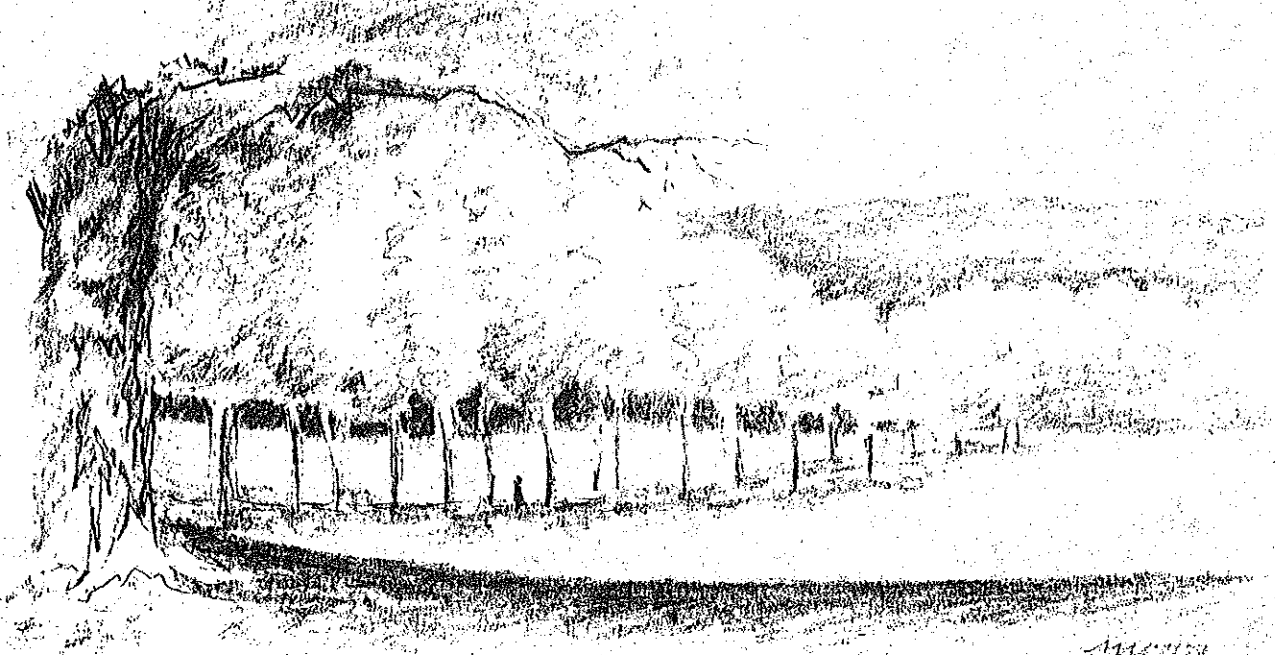
These few images of *rahamim*, in their reliance on the nurturing and generative characteristics of the female body, prove both effective and challenging. The imagery is effective because it is evocative. It represents the enduring and universal appeal of the ideals of the mother and child relationship. And all the warmth, tenderness, and life that are inherent in that ideal are affectively transferred to these maternal images. These images are challenging because they pose a criterion for the relations, ministries, and exercise of authority within and without the Church. Mercy, as depicted in these images, is a model that calls the Church to the practice

of tenderness and nurturing love, exemplified in the full embrace of the suffering person. It is through this embrace, then, that mercy of re-membering, is directed to solidarity with and restoration of those who have been abandoned to alienation and suffering.



Notes

- 1 Caroline Bynum, "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) 110–166.
- 2 Images like Mirhalet's *Mater Misericordia* were associated with the devotion to the relics of Mary's cloak, one of the devotions that returning crusaders brought home from their campaigns in the Holy Land. See Sally Cuneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and The Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996) 189.
- 3 Joanna E. Zeigler, *Sculpture of Compassion: The Pieta and The Beguines in Southern Low Countries* (Rome: Academia Belgica, 1992) 36.
- 4 www.natural_bridges.com/narr/pmd.html.
- 5 Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People From The Cross*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994) 19.
- 6 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992) 86–88.
- 7 Bynum *Jesus as Mother*, 150.
- 8 Bynum asserts that the role and qualities of mother were integrated into the role of the abbot, who integrated both maternal and paternal qualities in his leadership of the community, *Jesus as Mother*, ??.
- 9 Julian of Norwich quoted in Caroline Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 97.
- 10 Judith Whittet "Analysis of Stanley Spencer's Resurrection," <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/departement/fad/fe/woodrow/judith.htm>.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Susan Avery Quash, "Abiding Presence" in *Images of Christ*, 204.

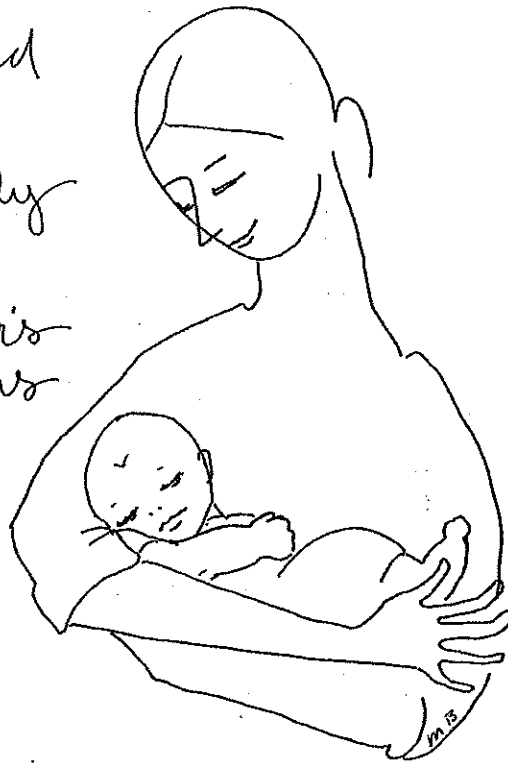


Mary
Kissing Jesus



As
a child
lies
quietly
in his
mother's
arms

so
my
heart
is
quiet
within me.





Contributors

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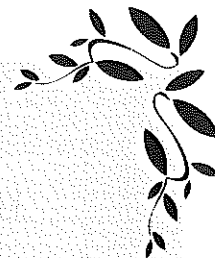
Troy W. Martin, Ph.D., is professor of religious studies at Saint Xavier University in Chicago. He is the author of *Metaphor and Composition in First Peter* (Scholars Press, 1992) and *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). Martin serves as the coordinator of the Midwest Region of the Society of Biblical Literature and director of the graduate certificate in pastoral studies at Saint Xavier University.

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Discussion Questions



(Clendenen/Martin) "... forgiveness without confrontation demands enormous amounts of psychic energy to hold feelings of forgiveness in place but requires from the offender no effort to modify or even recognize hurtful attitudes and behaviors."

How have you been successful in creating a climate that makes possible the breaking up of "the icy resentment" that builds between people prior to reconciliation?

(Doyle) "The culture of silence thrives every time one possesses knowledge that a person, situation, or substance is harmful and fails to confront that truth." Since a culture of silence is reinforced by an entire group's unwritten code of conformity, how can a single individual "break silence" without fear of retribution or shunning? What conditions need to be present in a group for breaking silence to be effective as a prophetic breakthrough?

(Hennessey) How does the idealization of maternal love foster a sense of personal dignity or restore that sense when it has been damaged? Which image of Mary's motherhood evokes this value for you? By what details in the artistic rendering?

(Howard) "Obligations are closely related to rights, and both rights and obligations are universal and inviolable because of the dignity of human persons. This natural dignity is presented as equal for all persons, and all are equally entitled to share in the benefits of society." Many of the Church's documents make sense as resistance to and correction of the violations to human dignity experienced by whole populations in Europe during World War II. How is respect for human dignity fundamental to Mercy's mission and direction statement?

(McKenzie) "We Catholics tend to be overly optimistic about the power of grace and lack an appreciation for the sin that exists in the world. It is difficult, if not premature, to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation in this crisis without a deep understanding of sin and its hold on human hearts." As you view the way the sexual abuse crisis has impacted laity in parishes, what conditions must probably precede an intelligent reconciliation with church leadership?

(Talone) Consider people you know who come from a culture different than yours—i.e., they belong to another race, come from another country, speak a first language different from yours, or practice a different religion. What of these people's life stories have you learned by talking with them? What makes them feel better when they are sick? What are the resources within their culture for healing the whole person?



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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, PA, June 13–16, 2004.

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, 8380 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.



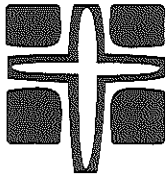
Creativity

... a way of
seeing
differently,
that, in God,
there are no
corners.
Within God's
heart,
Mercy's
rounded walls
universally
embrace
the rich - the
poor,
the sick - the
well,
the learned
and the
learning,
the good - the
bad,
even the
indifferent.

These, each,
have place
within
Mercy's
rounded
walls,
each creating
resonance
upon the
other,
strings
attached at
either end
to the
infinity
of Love
without
condition.

There is no
point
upon the
string
which,
plucked,
will fail to
yield a song.
Dirge or
jubilate,
practiced,
practiced
in creative
quiet
bears a
deeper
revelation
of the
Mystery

that God
has loved,
forgiven
and
absorbed
every
human
heart
in that
pretemporal
Mercy
which allows
us to
become
its
ministers in
time.



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