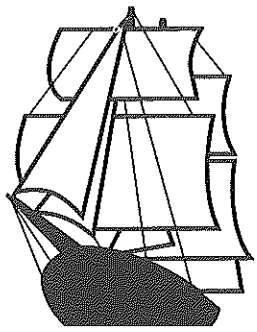

The MAST Journal

Re-Imagining and Reconfiguring

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Dear Sisters, Associates, and Friends of Mercy,

For months, the Iraqi governing council, guided by the U.S. State Department, has been trying to lay the groundwork for a new constitution, prior to holding elections and re-establishing Iraq as a sovereign nation. Overcoming the history of Saddam Hussein's decades-long one-man rule requires difficult choices. David Brooks, *New York Times* columnist, noted in October that delegates agree the new Iraqi constitution "should establish a democratic government, protect minority rights, guarantee the equality of all people (including women) and establish a government that is consistent with Islamic values without being subservient to theocratic law."

But the sea of choices includes choosing whether the government should be centralized in a presidential system or looser parliamentary organization. And where should the boundaries of new states in Iraq be drawn: along lines claimed by various ethnic groups, or by geographical divisions that distribute resources such as oil? What social issues should be left to the states, and which ones be subject to national policy? What role should religious law play in relation to civil law so that a new Iraq functions as a democracy, not falling subject to a mullah-king ruling in God's name, irrespective of the people's will?

Fortunately, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas does not have to start from scratch in its reorganization plan, though reconfiguration does present some questions analogous to those facing the Iraqis. Institute members claim the 1991 Constitutions, the fruit of an inspired process which took the decade of the 1980s to achieve, a charter affirmed by the Vatican after all the vowed members engaged in a one-person-one-vote process, a document then endorsed by regional chapters, prior to the creation of the Institute. The process of creating the Institute defined a structure for governance and making changes to that governance plan.

The rule of Saddam Hussein, who governed by dictatorship rather than democracy, made a constitution irrelevant. Participation in governance meant submission, not voice. Calling for a vote meant death or prison. Even putative democracies, such as Haiti, Chile, Argentina, and Peru, have sometimes suffered military rule by a president, mandating suspension of the constitution or the parliamentary process. The U.S. shines like a beacon, not because of flexing its military power around the globe. Rather, the nation prospers despite many political emergencies. Since its creation in 1776, it has never had its constitution suspended or Congress dismissed. The "balance of powers" among executive, legislative, and judicial branches assures the citizenry that the calamity of a coup by an unelected insurgent or rule by the military won't happen in this democracy.

Analogous to the U.S. Constitution, the Mercy Constitutions is central to its functioning. As the guide for a canonically valid decision-making process in reconfiguration, every provision of Mercy's core document should be read in context and in light of the conceptual arrangement and balance of powers. Noteworthy is that membership of vowed women (20–50) anchors the operation of the Constitutions. Discussion of authority structures (51–75) is enclosed by affirmation of full and active participation of members (76–78).

Thus, from the ground of membership arise structures of governance. These are accountable to church law (as well as civil law), Institute and regional community rules, but centrally, to the Constitutions itself, which can only be changed by a two-thirds vote of the Institute chapter with the approval of the Vatican (55). Only after affirmation of the Constitutions is there a description of the Institute Chapter as the highest authority; then follow the Institute president and council. The Constitution does not end here, but continues with the role of the leadership conference, composed of regional presidents. This still does not conclude the decision-making process. Integral to governance are regional chapters, which parallel but are distinct from the Institute chapter.

Finally, just as the Constitutions began, they conclude with focus on the members' input, concerns, and needs. "In virtue of membership, each sister assumes the responsibility to participate in the decision-making processes of the Institute" (78). The genius of the vowed women who wrote the Institute Constitutions owes much to a vision that citizens of the Americas inherit, governance by democracy. The Institute Constitutions remains a gift to a less democratic Church.

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

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Editor, *The MAST Journal*

"Root Metaphor" and Rublev's Icon "The Holy Trinity"

Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M.

As a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, I join with others of this religious community in being called to seriously consider issues and opportunities, both afforded us and confronting us, today. One way for me to participate in these matters has been to reflect on Andrei Rublev's icon, "The Holy Trinity" from the fifteenth century and on George S. Worgul, Jr.'s information on "root metaphor" in ritual. It is my belief that they have something to contribute to our conversation as we re-imagine and reconfigure, and thus engage and question our "root metaphor."

Symbol and Ritual

Our faith tradition, including Scripture, uses symbols and/or words to express content and meaning. Visual symbols and linguistic symbols both struggle to convey experiences, understandings, insights, and questions which are beyond our full grasp. Expressing content and meaning in silence, icons are part of this theological activity. And, however we express our theology, it is always incomplete. Yet, we are created in such a way that we are curious and inquiring, always desiring to understand, to be creative, to communicate and to relate, to make things, and to make things work.

Every group or community seeks ways to go beyond day-to-day language in order to express its deepest experiences and deepest values. For this purpose, art, literature, poetry, music, symbols, dance, and even silence are employed. Communities use all of these in ritual to both express content and meaning regarding who they are, and who they wish to be. However, ritual is also more.

Ritual has been recognized as an "essential element in the development, integration and sustenance of the human person and the human social community."[1] Worgul names four basic elements which are found in ritual. These are: behavior, repetition, interpersonal dynamics; and a value orientation.[2] A community's ritual develops a "pulse or rhythm which is part of the larger rhythm of a people."[3] Ritual supports communities in: sharing a common language that goes beyond everyday language, accepting and embracing "appropriate common patterns of behavior," and in constructing "social institutions or structures as a means of ordering and sustaining a common life."[4] Ritual carries meaning.

Ritual attempts to describe reality as it has been known and is experienced, and it attempts to express meaning (including questions) as it is known and experienced. Ritual is a reductionistic adventure in its attempt to take in: personal/collective subjective and objective experiences and understandings of heart, mind, and soul of past, present and future. Even a simple ritual needs to condense, make intelligible, and render valuable and meaningful a wide sweep of life. Though ritual is attempting to describe mystery, which we know can never be fully described or comprehended; we must exercise this dimension of our humanity. In the attempt is found additional experience for reflection, challenge, relationship, in-

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tegration, and meaning, for "the meaning expressed and experienced in ritual elicits a commitment from the participants. This promise is to be incarnated in a life style which expresses the meaning embraced in the ritual experience."[5] Ritual, as concerned here, regards relationship with, and questions of God.

Root Metaphor

Who are we seeking? Ritual effects intimacy. "Through the specific use of symbols and symbolic gestures, language and environment, ritual stimulates and focuses the imagination so that the distant God is experienced as present and the ritual community is 'thrown back' to their origin or 'charter event.'"[6] The gift of imagination in ritual allows and even emboldens "participants to interpret their life-experiences within the fundamental meaning systems of their community."[7] The "origin or charter event" is the "root metaphor."

So, we have to ask ourselves: "What is our "root metaphor?"

But first. . .

A "root metaphor" is alive. It is "born in the context of cultural transformation" and "social drama" which "commences with an action-event-person which is a breach of the established social order."[8] Worgul goes on to say:

> The breach may intensify into a crisis. Two alternatives emerge. The culture will successfully answer the challenge of the "revolutionary" group or it will be forced to expel them from the community. In the former case, the expelled group will establish its own cultural world with its distinctive metaphor and central ritual.[9]

A root metaphor determines how interpretation functions or how life and events are understood. It sets a parameter or "hermeneutical horizon for articulating the meaning of life as experienced and lived within a particular culture."[10] "Root metaphor" is also foundational for the relational, interpersonal life, identity, and communion of its members."[11] Worgul says also:

> In providing access to the community's charter event or root metaphor, ritual preserves and intensifies the experience of communitas and group solidarity by re-enforcing origin, meaning and purpose. The experience of communitas triggers ritual celebration.[12]

Celebration is a natural outpouring of life lived with meaning and purpose and in communion. And, according to Worgul, a "root metaphor" can function as a "social corrective."

> The clear expression of a root metaphor in ritual challenges the ritual community to evaluate how successfully the community's behavior and institutions conform to and adequately express the meaning of their foundational metaphor. The ritual experience always issues a call to renewal, reform and correction. By answering this call, a culture will be equipped to undertake the growth, transformation and adaptations necessary for survival without losing its fundamental identity.[13]

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Mercy's Catholic Root Metaphor

Theology emerges first and foremost out of religious experience. Today, the post-modern age lends itself to many expressions of religious experience in various spiritualities and theologies, some more cohesive than others, and some certainly in major transition. However, in this pluralism how do we come together in understanding our "root metaphor," as we wish to be "one" community in "union and charity"?

Can we still assume Mercy has a Catholic Christian "root metaphor"? And though Catherine McAuley inspires our charism, I contend she is not our cradle symbol. And using temporary, functional symbols as a means towards transformation and renewal is inadequate.

Aldous Huxley in *Ends and Means* understood this, as did Gandhi and King. How we get there is where we end up. And if we discern our future using insufficient means/symbols, we will sell ourselves short by not challenging ourselves to go to a depth we say we yearn to live. Can we name our "root metaphor" or even narrow the trees to a certain part of the forest?

Pluralism today is the standard fare and with it comes a value and desire to be accepting of diversity and differences. Yet, it can also lead us down a road where we lose our will to discern, judge, and make decisions. How do we find a balance?

I believe the challenge for us is to embrace our diversity of theology and spirituality at a deeper and much more open place. If we can draw close to the religious experience of one another, we may find that the God of beyond, night, mystery, the poor, the table, the cross, the earth, and the cosmos is the same loving God.

Trinity as Root Metaphor: Rublev's Icon

Though some today have difficulty seeing the symbol of the "Trinity" as a "root metaphor," I believe it can operate as just that, especially when explored with the assistance of theologians such as Elizabeth A. Johnson and others. This paper is not to lay forth the details of a renewed Trinitarian theology, but to suggest the Trinity be considered freshly; and to invite dialogue regarding its distinctive, relational, and invitational symbolism. Consider Rublev's icon of the "Trinity."

The "beauty" of an icon is not its greatest value, but rather its ability to teach and affect the person praying. Rublev seems to gather just enough of the essential lines and colors in order to compose a visual intimation that invites one in, and eventually through and beyond, to something more. He uses the "language" of line and color to communicate a narrative metaphor to the viewer. It is elegantly simple and unfathomably complex, as it inspires contemplation of the Trinity.[14]

Presented eloquently are three figures. They are messengers of good news to Sarah and Abraham. They come down the mountain, shown in the top right corner, to a community, a home, indicated in the top left corner. They sit under an oak tree of life and beauty, shaded from the heat. Sarah and Abraham welcome them, though they are suspicious and find there news hard to believe. They give hospitality to their guest at a table where those who have come before, are remembered. (The small rectangular drawing in the table is a reliquarium.)

The presence of the three is taken as a whole. They are equal in every way, and also distinct. Though the Godhead can never be represented, Rublev's icon symbolically speaks to the presence of the mystery as experienced in the world. In soft hues on the left is Mother, Father, Creator; in the center, more pronounced, is God made human; and on the right, is Spirit of fullness and life. His icon of three shows a gentle, continuing flow of movement with the tilting of their heads, gestures of their hands and feet, and their placement at the table. This movement forms a circle. The space at the base of the icon, where there is room at the table for us, is very important. The presence of God is among us, and we are invited to know this loving presence.

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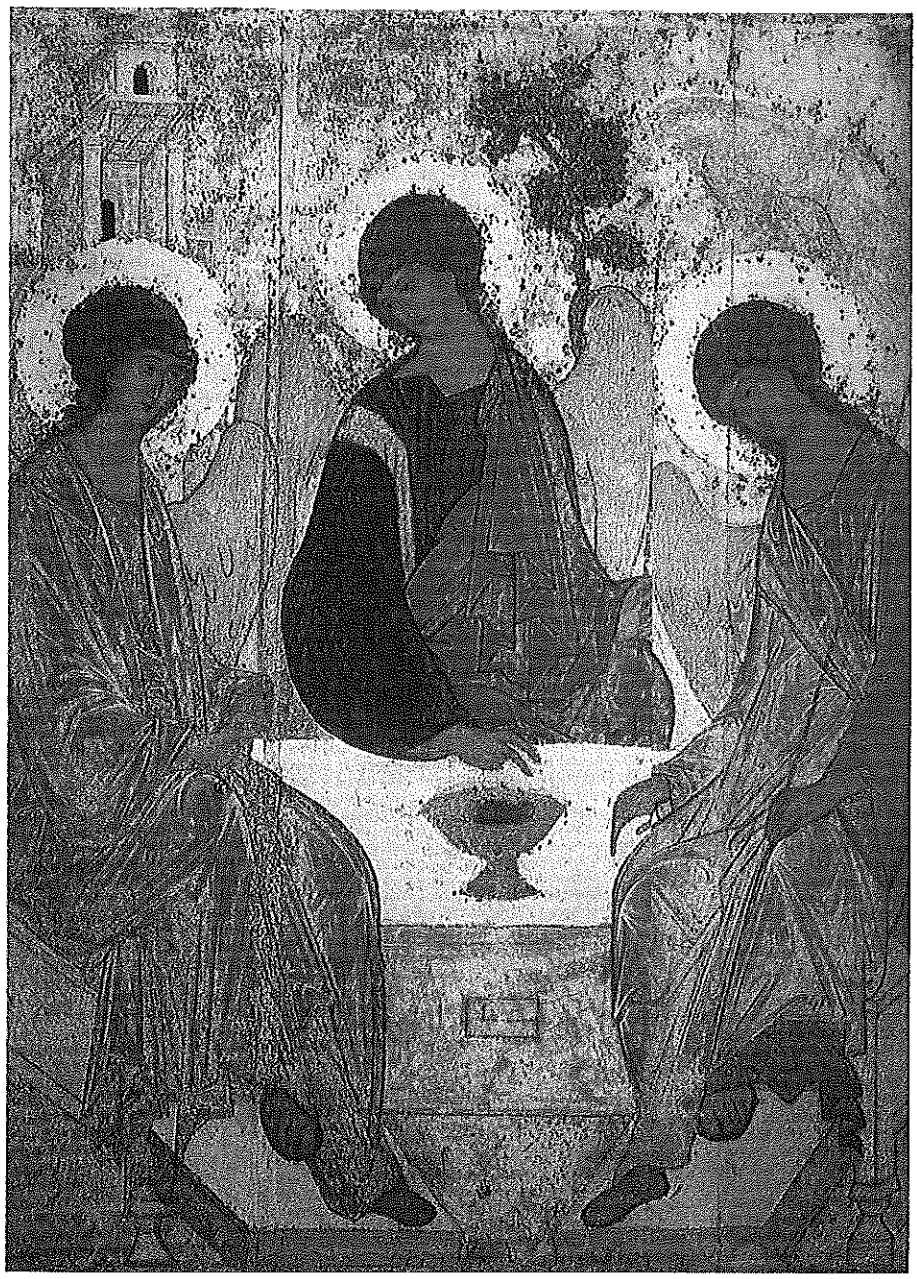
The purpose of this article has been to raise questions and dialogue about the subject of "root metaphor," and to suggest that we revisit the Trinity as such. For within this metaphor, there is room for significant pluralism and diversity if we are willing to adventure carefully and theologically into understanding what our diverse spiritualities might mean. Some will not resonate within the symbolic breadth of the "Trinity," but hopefully, it will

become clearer which ones do and which ones do not, and why. Perhaps a new way of seeing will emerge, or an old way renewed.

I believe continued, thoughtful conversation, rooted in our religious experiences of God, can contribute to our journey to a deep, new place as one.



Trinity, by Andrei Rublev

Notes

1 George S. Worgul, Jr., "Ritual," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990) 1101.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 1102.
5 Ibid., 1103.
6 Ibid., 1104.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 1105.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 V. Lossky, and L. Ouspensky. *The Meaning of Icons* (New Haven: Eastern Press, revised ed. 1983) 200–202.

Sacramental Thinking
A Catholic Treasure

Aline M-J Paris, R.S.M.

Andrew Greeley has written a book entitled *The Catholic Imagination* in which he makes a case for the uniqueness of Catholic thinking versus Protestant thinking.[1] Although sometimes making sweeping generalizations, Greeley points out that the uniqueness of Catholic religious thought lies in engaging the imagination rather than just limiting itself to the intellect. This Catholic sensibility comes from the appreciation of sacramentality which, for Greeley, "inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation."[2] Greeley bases his fundamental insight on the work of David Tracy who, in his text *The Analogical Imagination,*[3] notes that the Catholic classics tend to emphasize the presence of God in the world while those of Protestant theologians emphasize the absence of God.[4]

Along with Tracy and Greeley, I would also suggest that there is uniqueness to Catholic Christian thought just as there is uniqueness to Christian theology versus that of other world religions. In a recent Mercy publication,[5] one of the women presently in the process of incorporation described her journey of coming to Mercy as being first one through Buddhism and then Christianity. She indicated that what brought her to Christianity was the finding of a personal God in a moment of crisis.

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Catholic thought brings this idea of the personal God even closer; God is immanently present as well as transcendently present.

Sacrament of the Ordinary and Personal

In this short article, I would like to address the fundamental insight of God's immanent presence as sacramental thinking and explore the connection this insight may have with our current talk of re-imagining. Too often, when we hear the word sacrament, we limit our thinking to the seven specific events identified as sacraments with perhaps the addition of the sacramentals. Unfortunately, the definition of sacrament as the seven is a limitation, one which comes from the second millennium of our history.[6] I would prefer emphasizing the sacramental theology of the first millennium, particularly that of St. Augustine who identified 304 sacraments. A sacrament, in Augustine's understanding, was something which contained the reality it signified, therefore, any reality which points to God and manifests the presence of God within it, is a sacrament. This, for me, is the heart of sacramental thought—that our God can be manifested and experienced through all of nature, including persons. In the self-manifestation of God we can encounter the divine presence, or as we have traditionally said, "receive grace." Catholic sacramental thinking also reaffirms one of the first biblical messages regarding the created order, "God saw that it was good."[7] A sacramental theology, therefore, is also a creation theology and an incarnational one. Anyone and anything can become a bridge to the holy, or as Joseph Martos says, a "door to the sacred."[8]

I teach a course on sacraments at the college level and I use as one of the basic texts Leornado Boff's *Sacraments of Life,*[9] which is a book of stories

from his life that provide an understanding of sacramental thought. One significant story is that of a cigarette butt. You can imagine the students' surprise when they see the chapter heading "A cigarette butt as sacrament." But, this particularly odious item had become a sacrament for Boff for it was the cigarette that his father was smoking as he died of a heart attack. A particularly sensitive sister had included the cigarette butt in the letter announcing the father's death. The butt was the item that contained the last living breath of the father; it brought the father's last bit of life to Boff, who was an ocean away. Boff placed this ordinary item, this treasure, this relic in a special container, one could say a "tabernacle" and has kept it since as the sacrament of his father.

What a vivid example of an ordinary item becoming a sacrament when it contains some of the reality it signifies. This story is very effective with my students because it opens their eyes to see all of the sacraments that are part of their personal lives. Once they understand how to think sacramentally, they can be introduced to the Church's great heritage of the sacraments. So too with us, the Sisters of Mercy. Can we also begin to think sacramentally as we proceed in our discussions and planning?

Why Do Religious Exist?

We have been "invited" to re-imagine, reimage, reconfigure ourselves, in other words, to see ourselves as an organic whole in a new way. Some of the concepts, ideas and visions to inspire the process have come to us from the "new science" or the corporate-business world. But could and would thinking sacramentally have anything to contribute to this process? In order to explore this, I would begin with an even more basic question that is before all religions, "Why do humans exist?" Perhaps the answer of the Baltimore Catechism really isn't too far out of date, ". . . to know, love and serve God in this world and be happy with God in the next."[10]

In the past decades when religious congregations had significant group presence in schools and hospitals, our visibility was evident but perhaps the reason for our existence was wrapped up in ministry. Even Fialka's recent book *Sisters*[11] tells the story of women religious from the perspective of their dedicated and selfless service. Is it possible, however, that with the presence of large numbers of sisters, the focus was so much on the works, albeit good ones, that the sacramental nature of religious life was overshadowed? Today, the basic question seems to be like that of the Baltimore Catechism, "Why do religious exist?" And the answer is similar to that of the Catechism; it is in the knowing, and the loving, and the serving that religious make present and manifest the God who knows and loves and serves.

Although this vocation of making God present is not unique to religious, for many others do so also, religious publicly profess this vocation; that is, they stand before the church and the world and vow that they will manifest both in their personal and their communal identity the reality of God—a God who is personal, loving, and in relationship not only with people but within the Godhead itself. Our "sisterhood," our communal bond, becomes a sacrament of the Trinity; that is, at the depths of our religious beliefs, life is relational. We live communally because we are grounded in a God who is communal. Therefore, religious life is a sacrament of our God.

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Re-Imagining More Difficult than Reconfiguring

So, how do we re-imagine or reimage or reconfigure ourselves? The most complicated will be the reconfiguring because of all of the details involved, but, in some ways, it will be the easiest because it is the most concrete. When we think of re-imagining, the task becomes more ethereal. I would suggest that Greeley's idea of the Catholic imagination be employed here. If we begin to look at ourselves through the sacramental lens then we must ask,

what are the essential elements of a newly imagined or imaged Mercy Institute?

One essential element is that Sisters of Mercy give some manifestation of the spiritual life—that we be women who invite others, by our lived reality, into a relationship with an unconditionally loving God. We are "professionally spiritual." Although this may be a strange concept, it connotes the idea that when people look at us they have a right to expect that we will be somehow different in our responses, that we will convey that life has a depth of meaning, it is not just for the gain of fortune or fame, and that life is sacred, whether that life is unborn or on death row or in Iraq. We also need to manifest that life is eschatological, that we are pilgrims and stewards of life and of this earth as we pass through it.

We are "professionally spiritual." Although this may be a strange concept, it connotes the idea that when people look at us they have a right to expect that we will be somehow different in our responses, that we will convey that life has a depth of meaning.

To be professional spiritual persons means that others can expect from us guidance and insights into the ultimate meaning of life. So how do we re-imagine ourselves so that we will become more visible in this realm? We have done well in publicly witnessing to our fourth vow and the works of mercy, but do we do as well with witnessing to our prayer and contemplative life? The balance that we all seek between contemplation and action is a constant challenge for us personally, but perhaps it is also a challenge to the image of Mercy that we present to our cultures and world. So, as we re-imagine ourselves, we ask "Why do we exist?" and "What is the face of Mercy that will best sacramentalize a life of service that is centered in God?

"God will give success only to those who are united with Him by love."[12]

Notes

1 Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
2 Ibid., 1.
3 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroads, 1982.) Tracy stresses the need for analogical categories of thought when talking about God.
4 Greeley, *Catholic Imagination*, 5.
5 Jill Schallenberg, *Connection* (Burlingame, California: Sisters of Mercy Newsletter, July, 2003).
6 In 1158, Peter Lombard listed the seven sacraments in his *Sentences*. This was the list adopted by subsequent councils: Fourth Lateran (1215), Lyons (1274), Florence (1439) and Trent (1547).
7 The declaration of creation's goodness is a repeated refrain in the first account of creation (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).
8 Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1991).
9 Leornado Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, trans. by John Drury (Beltville, Maryland, Pastoral Press, 1987).
10 Question 6, *Baltimore Catechism* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1891, 1921) Catholic Information Center on Internet, Inc., 1995. http://www.catholic.net/RCC/catechism.
11 John Fialka, *Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).
12 Catherine McAuley, *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley* (St. Louis: Vincentian, 1927) 73.

Saturated with God
God-Talk in Re-Imagining the Institute

Maureen Crossen, R.S.M.

One of the beautiful treasures of Catholic tradition is our spirituality of sacramentality. Many of us of certain generations will remember the Baltimore Catechism definition of a sacrament: *an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.*

This definition remains a concise and useful guide. Sacramentality understands that outward signs, visible realities, reveal the invisible reality of the mystery and grace of God. For Catholics visible signs such as water, fire, a white garment, oil, bread and wine, a married couple, a sick person, a penitent, a priest, the assembly of the people of God, all of these, and more, reveal the presence of the incarnate God, so graciously made visible to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Taken to its authentic depth Catholicism recognizes that everything is saturated with God, dripping with grace.

This very basic, profoundly simple, yet too easily forgotten fundamental of Catholic spirituality also has a unique language, the language of metaphor. Metaphor is a language event that uses visible realities to reveal or to express invisible realities. Metaphor or symbolic language is also the language that Catholics use for God (as do other Christians, though not all, some take more literally the language they use for God).

Catholics are not literalists. When it comes to language for God we always use the open language of metaphor or symbol because we know that one or a thousand names or descriptions for God cannot definitively express who God is. God is always so much more than the limits of language. Yet, we are driven to express God in words, feeble as they are. God-talk becomes at one and the same time a fulfillment of our yearning for God and a constant reminder that we can never say all there is to say about God.

Language of Faith in Re-Imagining Process

In this essay, I want to develop some theological or faith language around the re-imagining and reconfiguring process. Then I'd like to suggest faith language for three terms used in the re-imagining template. First, I will suggest that the Trinity might be an interesting way of understanding "organic whole." Second, I will suggest a return to the concept of community over "sisterhood." And third, I will offer some comment on why we should speak of grace in its fullness along with "internal energy." I know that perhaps there were other terms used in the template that could be set within the context of faith language, but there is only so much one can do in a paper of this length. I also want to say that these are not the only theological suggestions that can be offered to the language of the template, as you will see in the other articles in this issue. Finally, I appreciate the insights and practicalities of the disciplines or fields out of which the language of the template arose. I simply want to add the profound depth of God-talk, that is, talking about God, the Word or the language that authenticates our lives.

That said, I will pick up with some observations on the dynamics of metaphor and then move into theology as "faith seeking understanding" in the re-imagining process.

The Dynamics of Metaphor

The contemporary philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, makes this observation on language in the conclusion of *The Symbolism of Evil*:

> (This) historical moment of the philosophy of symbols is that of forgetfulness and restoration. Forgetfulness of hierophanies, forgetfulness of the signs of the sacred, loss of humanity insofar as human

> beings belong to the sacred. The forgetfulness, we know, is the counterpart of the great task of nourishing ourselves, of satisfying our needs by mastering nature through a planetary technique. It is in the age when our language has become more precise, more univocal, more technical in a word, more suited to those integral formalizations which are called precisely symbolic logic, it is in this very age of discourse that we want to recharge our language, that we want to start again from the fullness of language.[1]

Ricoeur is concerned that we are losing the potential for language to express the symbolic; that is, to express in words what cannot be expressed in words. We have become so precise and literal that language is losing its power to express the sacred, which must always be beyond any literal words we use to express it. With this observation, Ricoeur's hermeneutic focus turns to metaphor as the instrument through which we can attempt to "recharge our language" and remember the sacred, or God as God, not as an idol or as a forgotten hierophany.

What a Metaphor Is

A metaphor for Ricoeur is not a clever pairing of noun and event as in a comparison or simile. A simile, for example, is what I think the Institute template offers with the molecule. It exemplifies the point that the template wants to make, namely that an entity can change into something else through internal energy. While the simile exemplifies a point, it does not necessarily offer a horizon for questions, challenge, or reflection on deeper realities. On the other hand, according to Ricoeur, metaphor arises out of poetic language by bringing together two similar realities. Through its poetic language, however, this word-event offers an impertinence to the similarity, thereby shocking the reader or listener into a new awareness. This expression "poetic language" is not to be confused with the specific genre of poetry, but rather poetic language is unique language that is "enchanting, magical" or what we would call theological or faith language. Metaphor is a language-event that uses visible realities to express invisible realities.[2]

In a rather dense study of the philosophy of language, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur presents the power or dynamics of metaphor. Let me do a little two-step through Ricoeur's *The Rule of Metaphor*. I'll begin with the end of the work. Ricoeur proposes that every metaphor presumes a metaphysics. That is, metaphor attempts to take us beyond, or meta, the physical/literal/known. In his own poetic way, Ricoeur says that metaphor is open language; that is, language that has the ability to *say something other than what it says*.[3] It is an event that opens worlds of possibilities. Through the metaphysics of metaphor, what the listener or reader is forced to at least see, if not move toward, is her *own utmost possibilities* by the shock of the new way of seeing what the metaphor proposes.[4] Thus, going beyond her physical or known reality or world, she encounters a metaphysical change, or at least the possibility of a metaphysical change.

World and Stage

This change occurs because metaphor takes words from similar realities, two things that appear pertinent. If the two words remain nouns nothing much happens. For example, world and stage. We may be familiar with both terms, but they are meaningless. However, put them together in a sentence or a story, and they become metaphor and create now a certain "impertinence." *All the world is a stage . . .* Now, the listener or reader must consider her role: actor? director? producer? stage hand? Or member of the audience? Or is she standing in line to buy a ticket? The power of metaphor is its ability to *re-describe reality* by making the listener or reader see invisible realities through visible realities and to live out or live into the reality described by the metaphor.[5] The metaphor calls forth a peculiar way of "seeing as . . ."[6] such as, seeing the world as a stage, seeing old age as dusk, seeing a suffering one as God's own, or seeing an old woman giving birth as a sign of a new future.

Biblical Poems

In order to move this along and out of the quagmire of the semantics of metaphor and the complexities of metaphysics, let me demonstrate the process through two biblical poems. Ricoeur does this with parables,

but I've chosen these poems because I want to move us into the reality of the "physics" of our present state and the possibility of going beyond what we know to what we do not know, which seems to be inevitable. Through the two poems we may be able to *see* our diverse responses to the re-imagining process, not only in a new light, but through the many incredible ways in which God is revealed through the tradition of a text in relation to our experience. Also the poems will demonstrate not only Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory, but how and why it is essential that we see our lives through God-language. First, I want to look at the Fourth Poem of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, then turn to the parallel figure of Mother Zion in Isaiah 66:7–14.

The Suffering Servant

The Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant arises out of the historical experience of the Exile. Israel was surrounded by nations and kings that were "keeping an eye" on them. The visual language in this poem is abundant. If ever a people had to re-imagine themselves, it was Israel in this situation, where they find themselves away from their land, the temple, all that they knew. The suffering of the servant however confronts them with their own suffering or their own sin, and they are challenged to move beyond how they had perceived themselves, and how they perceived the servant himself. They also come to a deeper, *new* realization about God. The poet in Deutero-Isaiah[7] uses suffering as the visible reality to reveal the invisible reality of the Presence of God, who resides with the servant in his suffering.[8]

"Seeing" in this poem is more than visual contact. It is a metaphor for recovering the metaphysical, of seeing . . . the deeper reality that God's presence is with the servant and that God's salvation occurs through him.

The poem begins with God calling out "See, my servant . . ." The sight to see in the poem is a suffering, disfigured man. At first sight his form is all that is noticed by "the nations . . . and kings" (52:15) and "we" (the people of Israel). In a sense, their "reading" of the suffering man is very literal. The nations and kings know not what to make of him. "We" see him only in appearance, in a first reference, or literal, somewhat legal reference (*smitten by God*, v. 4). There is at first apparently no ability or willingness to go beyond his physical appearance, that is, to move to a deeper reference or invisible reality.

The servant, on the other hand and in a peculiar twist for this explanation, expresses the metaphysics of his condition: beyond his physical grief he "sees his heirs" (v. 10), i.e., his future, and "he shall see the light in fullness of days" (v. 11). Here, in verse 11, it is God who sees the full depth of the servant's mission. With the bold proclamation, "See, *my* servant shall prosper" (52:13), God demonstrates God's profound presence with the suffering one whom God calls "my servant." With this servant who can barely be looked upon is a presence beyond the mundane ignorance of the nations and kings, and beyond the arrogance of the people of Israel. "Seeing" in this poem is more than visual contact. It is a metaphor for recovering the metaphysical, i.e., of seeing beyond the physical disfigurement of the suffering servant to a more profound reality: the deeper reality that God's presence is with the servant and that God's salvation occurs through him. The metaphor projects new possibilities for the servant and for Israel as each is raised beyond (meta) the literal confines of their present situation of suffering in disfigurement or in exile. To round out the poem, it is interesting to note that the nations and kings are never "re-charged" in their understanding as they never are able to go beyond what they see literally. One could also do an analysis of "speaking" or not speaking in the poem. For example the "nations and kings" do not speak, are dumbfounded. The Suffering Servant, too, does not speak, yet his silence speaks loudly.

Let me suggest the potential for this sort of language for re-imagining:

- God's passionate claim embraces the Suffering Servant. Indeed, the first verse and the last verse form a poetic embrace around the Servant. There is no getting away from God, even in exile, for Israel.
- The poem begins with God calling us to an awareness of suffering, and is this not where mercy responds most profoundly?
- Israel is changed forever in its approach to social justice through this poem. Whereas the people had thought beforehand that they must be whole and complete for God's presence to dwell with them, in this poem they recognize that God dwells with them in their suffering and brokenness.
- The Suffering Servant in Ricoeur's language "shoots an arrow of meaning" to Jesus. Isaiah provides Mark, Peter, our Good Friday Solemn Liturgy, our lives that are to respond to mercy, with a way to interpret or understand who Jesus is and who we are.
- Questions of ministry, mission, and I think, the vows arise from this poem.
- Furthermore, the poem is a classic, it has endured with what Ricoeur calls a "surplus of meaning" through generations of Jews, Christians, and Ethiopians (Acts 8:26–40).

Mother Zion

As the people are preparing to return to the land of Israel after the long, arduous Exile, the prophet in Trito-Isaiah describes the incredible event of homecoming as old Mother Zion giving birth, but without pain. Now a similar question that was raised with disgust and confusion in the fourth poem, is heard "who ever heard of such a thing or saw the like?" (66:8). This time, however, the question is pregnant with wonder and hope for something new, unimaginable. With all the comfort and solace, nurturing and security, strength and playfulness, that a mother has to offer, the metaphor of Mother Zion offers Israel a way to imagine (or re-imagine) and understand themselves before God.

> Shall I bring a mother to the point of birth,
> And yet not let her child be born,
> Says the Lord:
> Or shall I allow her to conceive,
> Yet close her womb?
> Says our god. (66:9)

In Mother Zion, Israel, *we*, have a past that we are called to mourn, and a future that promises prosperity and abundance. All of this comes about through labor (mission) with God as the midwife of this incredible birth. Again, the use of such poetic, theological language is powerful and prayerful, challenging and comforting. I might also add, in the sense of re-claiming our tradition as Christian women that just as the Suffering Servant serves as an extravagant metaphor for Jesus, so too does Mother Zion. Could she be the hermeneutic, or interpretive insight, through which we interpret Jesus' death as giving birth when we consider Jesus' own reference to his death as a woman in labor (John 16:20–22)? He does not even seem to suffer much agony on the Cross in John. His death is an act of giving birth finally from his side through water and blood (19:31–37).

Invisible Realities Signaled by Metaphor

Returning to Ricoeur, my point is that not only metaphor, but effective metaphor, poetic and religious language, is always based in the lived experience of human beings who yearn for deeper meaning or a glimpse of invisible realities. Language is the way we interpret and understand our reality. It is also a way in which we can create a very vital future by stepping beyond the literal and known into a world of possibilities, but possibilities that offer meaning and hope through ministry and mission.

When we drift away from faith language and theology, it seems to me that we run the danger expressed by the character of the elderly woman in the film *A Trip to Bountiful*. The old woman runs away from her son's home and her daughter-in-law's oppressive, constant third person reference of her as an old useless woman. The old woman is now headed to Bountiful, the town in Arkansas where she grew up. To continue to live with the oppressive language and treatment of her daughter-in-law would cause her to lose her true

self. In a cry of desperation to a stranger to whom she is telling her story she gasps: *I'm becoming the way she sees me!*

As women, aren't we aware of how forgetfulness of our experience and contributions throughout history has been played out in a world and church that had forgotten us or minimized our experience as women to the point of "endangered species" through patriarchy and male-biased language? But, can we not claim Mother Zion, or other poetic characters and religious metaphors to re-imagine our lives and future in the church? If we lose faith language as the way we describe ourselves, the way we plan our future, the way we live together and serve in the church and world, then we lose who we are as Catholic women rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The similes may give us some needed insight, but metaphor, and in particular, religious metaphor, offers us poetic language that open new worlds of possibilities to us as Sisters of Mercy.

Theological Language in the Re-Imagining Process

We know that any language that we use for God is metaphoric or symbolic, because we cannot know God fully. This is the great gift and beauty of metaphor, to use the visible to express the invisible. What we know is that God is revealed in the ongoing process of our lives and history through creation and in the sacraments of the church. The language we use for God, instead of being concrete, dogmatic or legal, is metaphor because the word "God" must be open.[9] Ricoeur reinforces the point that the name "God" is the name that opens us to new worlds of possibilities. This is why sacred Scripture is revelatory, because there are always new possibilities and insights into who God is. Ricoeur reiterates also that Scripture is not about "what happened" but, more significantly, about who is revealed, namely God.[10] The language of and for God, that which calls us into being, is the language of our religious life and the language of the church.

dead in your tracks by the mystery or beauty of what you have read? Moments when you must sit or are forced to sit in wonder of what you have just read and to ponder it. One of those moments for me was when I read Karl Rahner's axiom: *the Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa.*[11] Or, the way God is in the world is the way God is within the Godhead. I read this when I was writing my master's thesis on Jürgen Moltmann, but I ended up taking a two-day detour hunting through Rahner for more on this subject.

If we lose faith language as the way we describe ourselves, the way we plan our future, the way we live together and serve in the church and world, then we lose who we are as Catholic women rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Trinity

One of the ever ancient, ever new revelations of our faith that today is experiencing an extravagance of insight through its "surplus of meaning" (Ricoeur) is the Trinity. The Trinity could serve as a metaphor for what the template is trying to say through the expression "organic whole." The Trinity is a lively outpouring of love and gifts, relationship and community, unity and diversity, mystery and mission.

You know those moments in the study of theology or spirituality or in reading theology or spirituality, or whatever discipline one loves, when you are stopped

Then about ten years later, I was reading Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *God for Us*, where she describes what she calls "the dangerous separation" of the economic and immanent Trinity that occurred in theology in the fourth century. Our debt to Rahner, LaCugna, and many others today is their ability to reconcile and heal that dangerous separation for a revitalization of our church.

Briefly, Rahner and LaCugna reflect that the way the Trinity works and is revealed in the economy of salvation is the way the Trinity is within God's Self. What we see of God in the history of salvation is who God is.

There are not two ways of being God here. Put in terms of language: what God speaks is what God is. For us Christians, however, this "what" is actually "who." God can only speak Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the Trinity is revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit. In all of this, however, God never loses God's absolute mystery.

The power of the Trinity is that it draws us to the essence of God, which is mystery. In this mystery of God, *we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28). The mystery of God is not something we stumble upon by chance, as Karl Rahner has said.[12] Rather it is the ground of all that is. Indeed, to speak in terms of mystery is to offer the possibility of going beyond or more deeply into who we are as the creation, or the image and likeness of mystery.

Mystery is best described as love. This love pours itself out radically for the other, not concerned with self. Yet, at the same time, so confident in one's self is this love that one can risk *kenosis* or self-emptying for the other. I think that what I have just described may be a description of mercy as in *rachamim* (a Hebrew word for mercy, or *womb-love*).

To return to the Trinity and this process of mystery/love/Mercy, Eastern Christian theology draws on the metaphor of dance, *perichoresis*. As LaCugna describe this, it is "an enchanting movement of participation and exchange of inclusiveness, community, and freedom, which is the life of God within God and God for us."[13] Here we might recall Catherine McAuley's letter to Sr. M. de Sales in Bermondsey where Catherine describes her travels to the various communities as a variety of dances and concludes: "we have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back."[14]

The Fourth Part of the Organic Whole

In keeping with Ricoeur, in the metaphor of the Trinity dancing, the dance becomes more *real*—or a better *reel*!—with a fourth partner because the way the Trinity is as the Godhead is the way the Trinity is in the world and in creation. Here now we have a true "organic whole" that integrates diversity and unity, persons and other. The dance of God is not complete, whole and lively, without us, without all of creation.

But how do we participate in the life of the Trinity, which seems so overwhelming and powerful, not too mention so far above us or beyond us. We participate in the Trinity when we allow ourselves to be images of God; that is, to be like God with one another in the church and in the world. We dance with God when we create or are creative and welcome the new. We dance with God as Jesus Christ when we offer redemption, forgiveness of sins, healing, our lives as sacrifice for the other; i.e., the works of mercy. We dance with the Holy Spirit when we share in the fruits of the Holy Spirit: joy, kindness, awe, and so on. We participate in the Trinity more often than we are aware. Imagine or re-imagine what happens when we become aware of how saturated with God our lives are!

We see more deeply that without constant reference to the Other, including the created other, the Trinity loses its mystery, becomes stagnant, paralyzed, remote, useless as true mystery for us to encounter. When we forget our dance partners, a dangerous separation takes place. It is more dangerous for us who dissolve into nothingness for there is then no one within whom we could move and have our being. There is no "organic whole" anywhere if there is no God! If the language we use to describe our reality or to re-imagine ourselves is not God-language, then what is revealed about us? Certainly not anyone but ourselves. And then, what of our lives and vows that blossom from our Baptism in Jesus Christ?

Sisterhood and Community

Another image or metaphor of the Trinity is the fourteenth century icon of the Old Testament Trinity by Andrei Rublev (see page 5). The Three are seated around a table with an opening for the other, that's us, the viewers. Otherness is key in all of this and this is why we talk in terms of *koinonia* or community instead of sisterhood. In the icon, the Three-in-One are seated around a table with their gifts (the figures are clothed in their unique gifts) inviting us to come to the table ready to share in their *communio*, to participate in an exchange so deep that we are nourished in

such a way that to leave the table is to carry the *living memory* of this meal beyond ourselves.

Community connotes participation, sharing, an extension of those gathered always ready to welcome the other. Sisterhood, on the other hand, confines itself to, well, sisters. Although this may be a title that we have and although it may describe the way some of us feel about our relationships among ourselves, it does not describe how all of us feel in relationship to one another. Community opens up to brothers, associates, coworkers, people to whom and with whom we experience the Mercy of God.

More importantly, the significance of seeing ourselves as *koinonia* or community is that we are members of the community called Church. We need to see ourselves and call ourselves not a sisterhood, but members of the Body of Christ, the church, which consecrates us in baptism, calls us beyond ourselves in the Eucharist into the beauty and mystery of the church and into what is lacking in the Body of Christ in the church and in the world, hence the works of mercy.

Finally There is Grace

Grace is something other than personal or internal energy. It is a unique initiative that comes from God. In order to understand grace we must allow God to be God. God, who is radically Other, moves within us, to be sure. But God always calls us beyond ourselves and often calls us through others and in ways we cannot imagine or re-imagine. For us Christians, grace is the self-communication of God primarily through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Karl Rahner reminds us so consistently that God's grace, that is, God's self-communication, is most perfectly expressed in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ, and with Jesus Christ, we find ourselves founded as servants of God's mercy in the church for the concerns of the world. The memory (*anamnesis*) of Jesus and his life in us is discerned and recognized through prayer and attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the church, in the world and among ourselves. This is not our own internal energy, but includes who we are in the church and in the world. Perhaps this is our economic Trinity: ourselves, church and world, embraced by the immanent-economic Trinity of God. Grace, like the Trinity, like community, moves beyond us, changes us, transforms us, often in ways that are not of our own doing.

As I mentioned at the start of this article, our Catholic spirituality of sacramentality reminds us that we and all of creation are saturated with God. As Sisters of Mercy and associates of the Sisters of Mercy, our unique charism in the church is to recognize where the saturation of God is being wrung dry. Where there is suffering through poverty, sickness, ignorance, and violence, we are called to saturate this suffering with the Mercy of God. So, too, when we speak ourselves, we should speak God-talk, the language of our relationship with God, *for whom alone we go forward or stay back.*

Notes

1 Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1967) 349.
2 Paul, Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) 60.
3 Paul Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur—An Anthology of His Works*, ed. by Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 233.
4 Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics, *Studies in Religion, 5* (1975–76): 25.
5 *Rule of Metaphor*, 247.
6 Ibid., 61.
7 The Book of the Prophet Isaiah is actually three books. First Isaiah (chapters 1–39) was written before Israel went into the Babylonian Exile. Deutero- (or Second) Isaiah (chapters 40–55) was written while Israel was in Exile. And Trito- (or Third) Isaiah (chapters 56–66) was written as the Exile ended and Israel prepared to go home.
8 David Clines, "'I, He, We, and They'—A Literary Approach to Isaiah 52:13 – 53;12," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 1, (Sheffield, England, 1976): 40–42.
9 Rahner, Karl, "Foundations," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 44–51.
10 Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," *Figuring the Sacred*, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 217–235.
11 Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, 87.
12 Ibid., Vol. 4, 54.
13 Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 272–273.
14 Neumann, Sr. Mary Ignatius, ed. *The Letters of Catherine McAuley* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 272–273.

Re-Imagining and Reconfiguring the Institute
Insights from Catholic Social Teaching

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(Author's note: 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 impact of gender biased language.)

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is in the process of considering how to re-imagine our life together, and how reconfiguration of our organizational structures might further our life together and our mission of Mercy. This article explores insights that Catholic social teaching might offer in this process.

In our Mercy life, we come together in commitment to a shared mission and charism, to extend God's loving mercy in our world, especially to persons who are poor, sick, and uneducated. We share a life in common, committing our personal efforts, our resources and talents to this shared mission and charism. Our Mercy life is focused on deepening our bonds to God and to one another as we carry out this mission.

While it has many distinctive features, life in religious community is also life in a social group, a type of society. Whenever persons come together, whether in civil society, in various social groupings, or in religious communities it is necessary to consider the relationship between the individual and the whole, and between subgroups, individuals and the whole. Catholic social teaching includes principles of the common good and of subsidiarity that can be helpful in this consideration.

The Common Good

A basic definition of the common good is found in *Mater et Magistra:*

> The common good . . . embraces the sum total of conditions of social living, whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection.[1]

In *Dignitatis Humanae* the Council adds the concern that the achievement of the perfection of persons be "in a certain fullness of measure and . . . with some relative ease."[2] In *Gaudium et Spes* one of two similar definitions of the common good is that it is

> the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.[3]

In *Economic Justice for All* the United States Bishops cite this passage and add:

> These conditions include the rights to fulfillment of material needs, a guarantee of fundamental freedoms and the protection of relationships essential to participation in the life of society.[4]

Focus of "the Common Good"

These definitions give an indication of the understanding of the common good in Catholic social teaching. First, it is directed toward the fulfillment or perfection of individuals and of the various groups that make up a society. The concern for the common good is really a concern for the well-being of persons and for what is needed for their development and perfection. Second, the common good is a set of conditions existing in the life of a society that makes this fulfillment or perfection possible. Third, these conditions not only make individual fulfillment possible, they allow it to be achieved with some degree of relative ease. The common good, then, is not something to be measured and quantified. It is not some good over and above, or set against that of individuals. Rather, it must take into account what is needed for the attainment of human well-being. In

Populorum Progressio Paul VI says: "To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions, the human and spiritual progress of all men, and therefore the common good of humanity."[5]

Structures which allow and promote the development of human relationships of community and solidarity among people are essential for the personal and spiritual good of persons as well as for any material benefits that cooperation may make possible.

The common good refers to factors about the way a society functions, such as: the forms of personal interaction between family members and neighbors, the forms of political and economic organization, the availability and accessibility of work and of various goods and services such as food, housing, education, and health care. As noted in the comment of the United States Bishops cited above, this involves concern for rights, freedoms, and relationships, and is related to personal liberty and social participation as well as to material well-being.

Right of All to Share in Goods of Creation

There is a great deal more detail that can be developed in understanding the common good. Two areas will be outlined here. The first is the relation of the common good to the right of all to share in the goods of creation. Respect for the dignity of persons requires concern for the conditions needed for those persons to live in a dignified manner, concern for their ability to attain their own fulfillment and perfection. One way that this is expressed in Catholic social teaching is in its concern for the common good. Concern for the good of persons requires concern about the conditions and structures of society which further or hinder their good. Freedom, responsibility and participation are important elements in such considerations. The adequate distribution of the material resources of the society is another aspect of its regard for the dignity of persons and provides one important measure of how well it is providing for the common good. Affirmation of the right of all to a share in the goods of creation adds further to the concern for adequate distributional structures as a part of the common good. Inadequate distributional structures would leave some incapable of maintaining a dignified life, so adequate distributional structures should be considered part of the conditions required by the common good.

Fostering Intentional and Supportive Human Community

The second area is the social nature of human life. The assertion that "men are social by nature,"[6] is common in Catholic social teaching. It presents a view of human life in which community is not simply an accident or chance occurrence, nor a product of the will and selfish interests of individuals. Rather, the insistence on the social character of human life indicates a belief that "a wider community is needed to establish fully human conditions of life,"[7] and that human beings are incapable of living and developing their potential except in relation to others. The need to be related to others in society is a continuing need of each individual and not simply a requirement for certain developmental years. It is not limited to the material benefits of cooperative efforts and is not meant to claim that individuals, at least as adults, are always incapable of maintaining their physical existence alone. It is meant to assert that there is a form of need in human beings that is not limited to the material requirements of life, and that must be fulfilled if persons are to develop fully in their personal, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. This development requires relationships with other persons. Catholic social teaching traces the social character of human life to "the transcendent reality of the human being, a reality which is shared from the beginning by a couple . . . and is therefore fundamentally social."[8] Bonds of community and solidarity are seen as essential to the dignity of persons, and being a person is said to mean union with other persons in mutual love.[9] Because human life is essentially social, community is not necessary only to develop a person's full potential, it is also needed if human dignity is to be realized and protected.[10] Relationships and responsibilities to others in and through community are not viewed simply as an option, but as a necessity of a fully human life. This means that obligations to oneself and to others to respect human dignity will require certain obligations to the community as well as to individuals.

Catholic social teaching also recognizes that there is a sort of mutual interdependence between communities and their individual members. *Gaudium et Spes* speaks of an interdependence between the progress of the individual human and the advance of society.[11] The community is seen as essential to the realization and protection of human dignity.[12] It is needed to provide a context within which rights and duties are given concrete definition and to establish structures which make it possible for the rights and duties of human life to be fulfilled.[13] Yet, with this emphasis on the importance of society, the beginning and goal of social institutions is said to be the human person.[14] Fundamental rights are seen as the prerequisites of a dignified life in community, and a strong link is asserted between respect for human rights and a sense of personal and community responsibility for the common good.[15]

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity is an important principle in Catholic social teaching for determining the extent to which a government should be involved in the various activities of a society. This principle is introduced in *Quadragesimo Anno*, where Pius XI says:

> Just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to the community at large what private enterprise and industry can accomplish, so too it is an injustice, a grave evil, and a disturbance of right order for a larger and higher organization to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower bodies. This is a fundamental principle of social philosophy. . . . The true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them.[16]

John XXIII refers to this text as the "principle of subsidiarity" when he asserts that it is necessary for public authorities to take an active interest in production and social progress for the benefit of all the members of a society.[17] While Pius XI seemed concerned that the state not overstep its appropriate role, John calls for a balance between private institutions and public activity.[18] Later documents refer to subsidiarity as the principle governing the balance of public and private involvement appropriate in various situations.[19]

The principle of subsidiarity requires that what can be done adequately at a lower level of organization be left at that level. If individual initiative is adequate to bring about certain desired goals, then higher groups or the government should not intervene. If smaller groups, local governments, or voluntary organizations can adequately provide a needed structure or outcome, then provision for that need should be left at that level. But when these lower levels do not, or cannot provide necessary justice, coordination, regulation, or effort to sustain and promote the common good in an area, it is necessary for the higher level to intervene, and that higher level has a responsibility to do so in light of its purpose and obligation to secure the common good.

Re-Imagining and Reconfiguring

The question that must be considered is how this commentary on human social life translates to insights for aspects of our life in Mercy community in the present day.

One key insight is that we (the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas) cannot base our decisions regarding structures wholly on the either of two poles of the question. One pole would be to take a very individualistic approach to the question and take into consideration what will best serve the personal goals and happiness of the individual members of the Institute, or the preferences of the Regional Communities, taken as sub-groups within the Institute. Such an approach might serve some well, but at the expense of the good of the whole. The other pole would be to consider only the institutional or organizational good of the whole. The common good calls us to consider what will best serve the purposes and goals of the whole organization and the purposes that bind us together as one without losing sight of the well-being of the individual members. It calls us to processes that engage the freedom, responsibility, and participation of the members in ways that call each to consider the good of the whole as well as individual benefit and preference. We need structures and ways of being together that allow us to effectively use the resources of the Institute for the sake of our mission of Mercy. These are structures that will allow us to give due emphasis to how we are responding to the needs of persons who are poor, sick, and unedu-

cated. The structures also need to serve the good, both spiritual and material, of our members so that we can carry forth this mission of Mercy together.

Structures that create obstacles to either the growth and well-being of individual members or to the active and effective pursuit of our mission to persons who are poor, sick, or uneducated do not meet the challenge of the common good.

The principle of subsidiarity also seems relevant to our considerations of re-imagining and reconfiguring our Institute. While it is important to engage the membership in shaping the direction this re-imagining and reconfiguring will take, there may also be a point where key decisions can only be made by persons in positions of authority after appropriate consultation and deliberation. Each of us brings our own vision and perspective to the dialogue and decision-making. There are decisions that are most appropriate at the level of the individual or of varied subgroups within the larger organization. There are other decisions that can only be made with the view of the whole available to those responsible for the good of the whole. The principle of subsidiarity calls us to careful consideration of the level appropriate to each decision.

Questions

I will conclude by raising some questions concerning the common good and subsidiarity that may be helpful to keep in mind as we consider the ways we will organize ourselves as Institute into the future.

- How will a given structural form help us to support one another personally and spiritually, in our life in community?
- How will the relationships among us be strengthened or weakened by the way we form our structures of community?
- What structures will help us to focus our resources toward our mission of Mercy so that we can effectively extend or maintain our service to persons who are poor, sick, or uneducated?
- How will our structures help us to keep decision-making at the appropriate level?
- How will the necessary balance between the good of individual members, and of our shared mission of Mercy be supported by the organizational, relational, and governance structures we adopt?

Notes

1 John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), (MM) 65.
2 Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot (New York: Guild Press, 1966), (DH) 6.
3 Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), (GS) 26. The other definition is at GS 79.
4 United States Catholic Conference, "Economic Justice for All and the U. S. Economy" *Origins* 16(24) (Nov. 27, 1986): (EP) 79. Reference is made to Pope John Paul II, Address at the General Assembly of the United Nations, Oct. 2, 1979, 13 and 14. (EPM will be used to refer to the Pastoral Message published with the Pastoral Letter).
5 Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1967), (PP) 76.
6 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1963), (PT) 31. Also see PT 46; GS 12; PP 36; SRS 29; EPM 14; EP 63.
7 GS 74.
8 John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" *Origins* 17(38) (Mar. 3, 1988): (SRS) 29.
9 EP 28; EP 64, with reference to GS 32.
10 GS 12; EPM 14.
11 GS 25.
12 EPM 14.
13 MM 67.
14 GS 25.
15 EP 79.
16 Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, in *Reorganization of Social Economy: The Social Encyclical Developed and Explained*, ed. Oswald von Nell-Breuning, English edition prepared by Bernard W. Dempsey (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1936), (QA) 79.
17 MM 52–53.
18 MM 57–58.
19 PT 140–141; GS 86; Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, New York: 1976), (OA) 46; EP 99.

Women and Spirituality

Ellen Murray, R.S.M.

The twentieth century has been heralded by a leading scholar in the area of spirituality as the "century of women," a time in which the emergence of women will be recognized as *the* defining characteristic.[1] Integral to the emergence of women and women's concerns around the globe are new perspectives on spirituality being generated by women. The term *spirituality* refers to both lived experience and academic reflection on that experience. Women's lived experience is central to an understanding of contemporary spirituality, i.e., it is central to women's self-understanding and expression; it is central to women's way of being in the world; it is central to women's relationships to God, to others, and to the earth. The second half of the twentieth century has seen an explosion of interest in the area of spirituality among women and men.

Once a term used almost exclusively in Roman Catholic circles, spirituality is now employed by Christians of every denomination, followers of other faith traditions, and in some cases by those in non-religious circles. Observers of the field concur that although it is difficult to pin down the combination of complex factors that have contributed to this shift, nonetheless, references to "spirituality" appear in diverse and varied arenas.

Broad descriptions and definitions of spirituality abound in current scholarly and popular literature. The root of the Christian use of the word *spirituality* claims its origin in the Pauline references to "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*), pertaining to any person or activity under the influence of the spirit of God. A concise contemporary definition is offered by Sandra Schneiders. Spirituality is "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives."[2] Christian spirituality, therefore, is the ordering of every aspect of a believer's life in relationship to the God revealed in and through Jesus Christ and lived out in the Spirit as manifested in the church. In essence, Schneiders stresses, Christian spirituality is Trinitarian, Christocentric, and ecclesial.

Spirituality as an Academic Discipline

A relatively new academic discipline, Christian spirituality is related to, yet distinct, from theology; the relationship between the two has an interesting history.[3] Prior to the twelfth century, spirituality and theology could not be conceived of as separate from one another; all theology was understood as an aspect of spirituality and all spirituality as a dimension of theology. Theology, as "faith seeking understanding," drew from the one spiritual source— that is, reflection on Scripture. By the Middle Ages, scholars such as Thomas Aquinas predominantly employed philosophical categories for the divisions of theology. The aspect of faith relating to lived experience, i.e., spirituality, was assigned to

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dogmatic theology, eventually relegated to a subdivision under moral theology, and later delineated into two subdivisions: ascetical and mystical. By the nineteenth century, "mystical theology" or "spiritual theology" came to be understood as that which pertained to the interior life and remained the purview of a select few who were "seeking perfection." This approach persisted until the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), when a call for a return to the sources of theology facilitated a renewed understanding of the call to holiness and thus to spirituality. Highlighted by the Council documents and rooted in the gospel, this call led to personal and communal reflection on all experience in light of Christian faith.

The impact of the "turn to experience" in theology, which is at the heart of spirituality, has contributed to a renewed understanding of spirituality within a contemporary Christian context. It brought about a shift from a narrow focus on the "interior life" to the assertion that spirituality is about every aspect of one's life of faith. Although distinct from one another as academic disciplines, theology as "faith seeking understanding" and spirituality as "reflection on the lived experience of that faith," mutually nourish and support one another. Therefore, spirituality as an academic discipline is reflection on the lived experience of faith that encompasses all aspects of the daily living out of one's relationship with God—physical, intellectual, emotional, psychic, social, and political. The proliferation of academic programs, the establishment of scholarly societies dedicated to the discipline, the presence of sections for the study of spirituality in the larger scholarly societies concerned with the study of religion and theology, and the vast amount of scholarly literature that has emerged related to this field all give evidence that the study of spirituality has clearly found a place in the academy.

Upon examination of the Christian tradition in light of women's experience, Catholic feminist scholars are offering a systematic revision of Christian theology.

Catholic feminist scholars such as Anne Carr, Joann Wolski Conn, and Sandra Schneiders have made significant contributions toward moving spirituality forward as an academic discipline. An important distinction to note is one made between "women's spirituality" and "feminist spirituality." They are not the same. Anne Carr distinguishes women's spirituality as one that would study the spiritual practices and experiences of women across various time periods or focus on women among particular religious, racial, and cultural groups, and highlight certain "female" characteristics; e.g., relational, emotional, and natural (i.e., connected with nature) of their spirituality.[4] Christian feminist spirituality, on the other hand, is intentionally focused on and critically aware of the restrictions on women pervasive in history and cultures and calls for a full, mutual, and reciprocal relationship between women and men.

Christian feminist theologians maintain that women have been erased, denied, and diminished by the patriarchal and androcentric focus of the Christian tradition. While some feminist theologians deem Christianity hopelessly patriarchal and have chosen to abandon the tradition, there are many feminists—vowed religious, married, and single women and men—who remain among the "loyal opposition."[5] Upon examination of the Christian tradition in light of women's experience, Catholic feminist scholars are offering a systematic revision of Christian theology. The implications of this project in terms of women and spirituality cannot be underestimated. Women across cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic boundaries continue to explore and probe questions such as: How do women image and talk about God? How do women view themselves as persons in relationship to God? How do women participate in and celebrate the sacraments and rituals of the

Christian community? Where do women seek models and guides along the path toward integration and wholeness? Given the broad range of scholarship involved in each of these issues and their impact on women and spirituality, the remainder of this entry is necessarily limited. Two crucial areas are highlighted: female images of God and the rediscovery of women saints as models of holiness.

Female Images of God

An area that has received considerable attention with regard to women and spirituality concerns images of God. The bias evident in Western culture and in most cultures in the world toward the male is compounded in terms of women and spirituality when male images and language are employed exclusively to represent God. For the past two thousand years, this has been the case in Christianity. Rooted in the belief that no one image or word can express the fullness of the mystery of the God, many Christian women and men have sought to offer a corrective to the dominant use of masculine images (e.g., Father, Lord, King) for God. The exclusive use of male metaphors for God in Christian worship and teaching has solidified in the religious imagination of most Christians the false understanding that the God revealed in and through Jesus Christ is male. Moreover, given the critical consciousness born of the women's movement, the absence of references to the female images of God contributes significantly to the alienation of many women from Christianity. Gender (i.e., the social constructions of femininity and masculinity) studies demonstrate that the issue is beyond the simple use of language; words and images speak of who we are and how we are related to one another.

Drawing on the multiple female images of God offered in biblical texts, most notably from the Sophia tradition in the wisdom literature, Elizabeth Johnson presents a critical retrieval from Scripture and the Christian tradition of female metaphors for the triune God. The God of Jesus Christ, present and active among us, is named as Sophia-Wisdom, *She Who IS*.[6] Johnson emphasizes the limits of human language to fully name our incomprehensible, compassionate, loving God. Christians are challenged to incorporate authentic and multifaceted female metaphors for God into communal worship and personal prayer. Christian faith in *She Who IS* can be articulated and celebrated in a myriad of ways, in ways that serve to reintegrate the connection between body and spirit, between women's bodies and the Creator Spirit.

In relationship to the person of Jesus of Nazareth, biblical scholars attest to the fact that the physicality of his maleness does not exclude the radicality of his behavior in breaking the social norms of his day. This continues a theme also evident in Hebrew Scripture of providing alternative social models for women than their conventional patriarchal subordination to men. Reflection on the Scriptures manifests believers' awareness in both testaments that liberation from oppression embraces not only social and political structures but also all of God's creation. A connection among female images of God, female embodiment and ecology is incorporated in a spirituality that emphasizes justice, protests any and all diminishment of the person, insists on regard for God's creation, and longs for fullness of life and dignity for all women and men within the cosmos.

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Rediscovery of Women Saints

Scholars are making great efforts on behalf of the spirituality of contemporary women to mine the Christian tradition for the wisdom and witness of women from past centuries. The whole tradition of the "communion of saints" has been reframed to celebrate these women and men as "friends of God" and Christian companions on the journey.[7] Hagiographic accounts of women's lives have been presented through a patriarchal lens with a type of piety and spirituality that emphasized for women the virtues of passivity and submission. Scholars are re-examining the presentation of women's role as complementary to men's, a relativizing that has dominated Western culture in general and Christian religious practice in particular. The project is one of searching out and remembering the names and experiences of women throughout the centuries who can speak to women today across the historical and cultural divides about what it means to be in relationship with God and live a Christian life. This scholarship has been enriched and expanded by a critical call from women of various social locations and cultures to attend to the multifaceted reality of women's experience.

Women are hearing and listening to the stories told of our foremothers in faith: women like Sarah and Hagar, who trusted in God's promises to them; Miriam of Nazareth, a Jewish village woman who was a faith-filled disciple; Mary Magdalene, a woman sent to preach the good news of the resurrection; and contemporary Christian disciples like Dorothy Day, a woman radically committed to peace and to the homeless poor of her day. Examples of significant rereadings by women of the some of the classic spiritual literature abound, for instance, Constance FitzGerald offers a retrieval of the insights of John of the Cross on "impasse" and the "dark night" for women in the church.[8] Joann Conn presents a feminist reading of Thérèse of Lisieux insisting that the "Little Flower" can be "a resource for a 'discipleship of equals.'"[9] Two of the works in the annual Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality specifically focus on medieval women as models and witnesses for women today.[10] To highlight one, Mary Catherine Hilkert identifies Catherine of Siena as a woman deeply immersed in the spirituality of her day who spoke with authority and whose voice inspires and challenges the voices of women today.

Acknowledging the diversity with regard to women and spirituality—that no one experience is universal—that no one expression is the norm—the spirituality of women continues to be sustained and nourished by rich resources from Scripture and tradition. What the emerging issues in Christian spirituality will be in the twenty-first century and how they will find expression remains to be seen; one thing is certain—women will be at the center of these issues and expressions.

Notes

1 Sandra Schneiders, *With Oil in Their Lamps: Faith, Feminism, and the Future* (New York, 2000) 4.

2 Schneiders in J. W. Conn, ed., *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* (2d ed., New York, 1996) 30.

3 Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy" *Theological Studies* 50 (Dec. 1989).

4 A. E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco, 1988).

5 Schneiders, *With Oil in Their Lamps*, 65. See also "Feminist Spirituality" in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. M. Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: 1993) 972–986.

6 E. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, 1992).

7 E. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (New York, 1998).

8 C. FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," in J. W. Conn, ed., *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* (2d ed., New York, 1996).

9 J. W. Conn, "A Feminist View of Thérèse." In J. W. Conn, ed., *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* (2d ed., New York, 1996) 452.

10 E. Dreyer, *Passionate Women: Two Medieval Mystics* (New York, 1989) and M. C. Hilkert, *Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today* (New York, 2001).

A Woman About to Give Birth
Lamentation and Life

Maria DiBello, R.S.M.

At the end of her address in which she presented the template for Re-imagining/Reconfiguring the Institute, Sister Marie Chin quoted Rilke:

> I feel it now; there's a power in us
> to grasp and give shape to our world.
> I know that nothing has ever been real
> without our beholding it.
> All becoming has needed us.
> Our looking ripens things
> and they come toward us, to meet and be met.

The maelstrom of feelings swirling around the re-imagining process evokes an earlier address Marie gave to the National Aids Ministry Annual Conference during the Jubilee year. In it, she reflected on the "paschal configuration" held in all human life. She unfolded the image of "giving birth" as one "offering unique insight into God's way with humanity . . . into the cross, into creative and creating pain, into life coming out of death, and even into the boundaries which must be negotiated when we move into new life."[1]

The re-imagining process has stirred attraction and dread; unease and excitement; enthusiasm and resistance. Could it be that the ambiguous currents of feeling we are experiencing as we enter this moment in the life of the Institute are the waves of heart integral to the journey claimed by each "woman about to give birth?"

In her talk, drawing from Walter Brueggemann's description of the stages of birth, Marie first focuses on the long period of waiting on what is "ripening" within a woman—the movement from being securely oriented to the realization that all is changing.[2] The sharpened sense of "the inevitable" in this in-between period sets her on a roller coaster of emotional response: joy and dread, sadness over the loss of a former state of life and the promise of newness, helplessness and power, expectancy and fear. Marie emphasizes that the woman who represses or resists awareness of her own bodily responses to the mystery unfolding within her impedes both her child's entry into the world and her own awareness of that entry. "To the degree that she is hospitable and receptive to what is happening to her, to that degree will she be oriented to the mystery, the knitting and creative power within herself."[3]

The onset of labor marks the transition ending this phase. The woman is "painfully dis-oriented." She is at the mercy of the tremendous life force taking hold of her and coursing through her. She must wait on its movement. Once again, this is a time of paradox. The chaos and isolation of labor's pain coexists with an intuitive awareness of connection to the life process of the universe. The woman needs the human touch and voice to hold her in this liminal place, the journey beyond self-absorption to compassion, suffering *with* all creation. Giving birth gathers up her self-emptying surrender in an outpouring of that which is ready and wants to be born. She is *wondrously reoriented* to the mystery of life she has shared. "A woman about to give birth has sorrow because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world" (Jn. 16: 21).

Biblical Images of Pain of Birth

The psalms of lament and the book of Lamentation offer a beautiful model of honoring the pain and hope that bring new life. . . These wrenching prayers refuse to deny the price of birthing. In the midst of complaint and grief, they plead for God to see. "Cry out with all your heart to Adonai, O Daughter of Zion. Let tears run down like a torrent day and night" (Lam. 2:18). In *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, Kathleen O'Connor defines the hope that

erupts from these anguished pleas. "Hope is not optimism or 'wishful thinking.' It comes from elsewhere . . . unbidden, illusive, uncontrollable and surprising . . . given in the pit, the place of no hope."[4] As we women of Mercy behold what is becoming, what is coming toward us to meet and be met," we realize that life as we knew it is changed. O'Connor urges us to cry out our awareness of this frightening disintegration. "Lamentation marks out the place of the ruptured life, when the old story fails and a new one has yet to appear."[5]

The voices of lamentation invite us to attend to our distress, to face it, and to meet it with gentle compassion. As our hearts' reality is called forth, named, and reverenced, we realize we are not alone. We sing, "We do this together." The same human touch that breaks through the throes of birthing, connect us to one another as sisters—and to a creation "in agony until now" (Rom. 8:22). Conversely, O'Connor reminds us, "When denial becomes a hardened way of life, it inhibits human flourishing, cuts off the spirit at its roots, silences voices, and blocks passion for justice. Denial constricts hope, depletes life, and aborts praise. Crushed spirits cannot worship unless that worship speaks from the pain."[6]

As we turn to ourselves in truth, we meet our infinitely tender God. We discover our connection with others. The cries of "a woman about to give birth" gather up the torment of our world, together with our own losses and brokenness. Our Constitutions speak of the mystery with exquisite simplicity. "Community strengthens us for mission" (Constitutions 19).

Perhaps this moment in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is a gift of grace that allows us to hold on to one another more dearly "for dear life" as we give birth to what is ripening within us. The pain, compassion, and trust we share gives us entrance into the suffering denied in our society. The tears of the world are the waters of our own birthing struggle. As we recognize the "paschal reconfiguration" in ourselves, we can become better attuned to the silent lamentation of those denied justice in our world.

In a particular way, those of us in North America are invited to re-imagine our belonging to the urgency for life and transformation born of conversion. O'Connor's words say it well: "Unless those of us who care for the well-being of the earth and its peoples come to terms with our own pain, we are unlikely to be able to receive the suffering of others on their terms. Until we, the people of the only remaining super-power, recognize our own hidden despair, we will not be able to receive the tears of the world and to see our own complicity in them."[7] We give ourselves over to the self-emptying movement of the Spirit, the life-force that allows us to follow Jesus more lightly and freely in his compassion for suffering persons. We pour out all the energy of heart and mind we can bring to this call. Fragile and vulnerable, we rely on the Mercy that is life for the world. "The favors of the Lord are not exhausted; each morning they are renewed, so great is God's mercy." (Lam 3:22–23)

There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
A shatteredness out of which blooms
the unshatterable.
There is a sorrow
beyond all grief which leads to joy
and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges strength
There is a hollow space
too vast for words
through which we pass with each loss,
out of whose darkness
we are sanctioned into being.
There is a cry deeper than all sound
whose serrated edges cut the heart
as we break open to the place inside
which is unbreakable and whole"
while learning to sing.[8]

Notes

1 Marie Chin, "Practicing Sabbath" *National Aids Ministry Annual Conference*, Chicago, Illinois, July 21, 2001.
2 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
3 Marie Chin, "Practicing Sabbath."
4 Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and The Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002) 57.
5 Ibid., p. 85.
6 Ibid., p. 87.
7 Ibid., p. 88.
8 Rashani Rea, 1991 "Earthsong Sanctuary"; used with permission www.rashani.com.

Sarah and Elizabeth
Paradigms for Re-Imagining and Reconfiguring

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M.

As I reflected upon the re-imagining video circulated by the Institute Leadership Team, I was struck by the absence of a theological foundation. A similar observation was articulated by members of MAST at their annual meeting in June 2003. As a group, we identified several scriptural texts that could serve as a theological prism for viewing our journey toward reconfiguration.

We chose Scripture texts because they describe God's relationship with humanity. The Hebrew texts describe the Lord's blessings to Sarah, while the New Testament focuses on God's gift to Elizabeth. In this essay, I propose to analyze the stories of Sarah and Elizabeth to discern God's message for us as we plan our future as an institute.

Sarah's Story

The Hebrew people were nomadic and first settled in Ur, a Babylonian city within modern Iraq (Gen. 11:28). They later migrated to Haran, Canaan, and Egypt. The Sarah legend unfolds through three episodes: the Egyptian experience (Genesis 12), the dilemma over being childless (Genesis 16) and the birth of her son (Genesis 18, 21). Sarah's story begins with Abraham's divine call to leave his homeland and relocate to Canaan (Gen. 12:1–3).[1]

The Egyptian Experience

Abraham and Sarah traveled from their homeland to Canaan, where the Lord appeared to Abraham. The Lord promised Abraham that his offspring would possess the land despite the fact that it was occupied by the Canaanites and the fact that Sarah was barren (Gen. 12:6; 11:30). However, a severe famine threatened the lives of the residents and Abraham took his family to Egypt.

Prior to entering Egypt, Abraham commented on Sarah's beauty and his fear that the Egyptians might kill him to possess her. To avoid danger, Abraham asked Sarah to tell the Egyptians she was his sister (Gen. 12:12–14). Abraham was correct; Pharaoh took Sarah into his house. As a sign of his gratitude, Pharaoh furnished Abraham with many tokens (Gen. 12:16). He also provided Sarah with a maidservant (*shifhah*) to act as her companion. Within a Mesopotamian culture, a *shifhah* might be given to a child at the time of marriage by her parents.[2] A special bond often developed between the women. The gift-giving stopped when Pharaoh discovered Abraham's deception about his relationship to Sarah. He expelled the aliens from the land, and they returned to Canaan (Gen. 12:18–20; 13:12).

The Dilemma of Being Childless

The Egyptian experience provided the background for the major motif regarding Sarah. She was barren, elderly, and probably would not produce an heir, but she had a *shifhah* named

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Hagar (Gen. 16:1–2). To be barren was regarded as a misfortune in a patriarchal society,[3] though not within a matriarchal one.

In "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," Savina Teubal comments on the Mesopotamian priestess tradition. The author claims priestesses frequently abstained from bearing children themselves but employed their maidservants to provide an heir for their husbands.[4] In the Arabic text, Sarah is described as a priestess.[5] Thus, Sarah's command to Abraham to go to Hagar was consistent with her cultural tradition. Hagar conceived and bore a son. The *shifhah* produced an heir for the couple (Gen. 16:3, 16).

Several years later the Lord again appeared to Abraham. God promised Abraham he would become the ancestor of many nations and his wife would bear a child within a year (Gen. 17:17). Abraham laughed at the idea that Sarah would bear a child at ninety, but God confirmed the message.

The birth prediction was again raised by three visitors to Abraham's tent. Abraham invited the guests inside to celebrate a feast.[6] During the conversation, the men reiterated the promise (Gen. 18:10). Sarah overheard the conversation and laughed at the possibility of bearing a child in old age. The visitors replied: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" (Gen. 8:14). The question summarizes the biblical author's theology, a belief that nothing is impossible for God. The final narrative about Sarah is an implementation of this theology.

The Genesis story reveals God's relationship with humanity . . . God's promise would be fulfilled through an elderly couple, Abraham and Sarah. Through them, the author articulates a theology that nothing is impossible for the Lord.

The Birth of Isaac

The Lord blessed Sarah and she bore Abraham a son (Gen. 21:1–3). When he was weaned, Abraham prepared a feast. Despite the joyous atmosphere, Sarah resented the possibility that her legacy might be shared with Hagar (Gen. 21:10).[7] Their relationship had deteriorated after the birth of their sons. Early in their relationship she was her companion, but now she is her slave (Gen. 16:3; 21:13).

To secure Isaac's inheritance, Sarah encouraged Abraham to dismiss Hagar and her son (Gen. 21:10). Abraham complied. After Sarah's death, Abraham sent his servant back to his father's house to select a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:40). The servant returned with Rebekah. With their marriage, Abraham and Sarah were able to pass on their legacies to the next generation of family members. God's promise would be fulfilled through Isaac's descendants, while Rebekah would be the recipient of the priestess title.[8]

Summary

The Genesis story reveals God's relationship with humanity. Throughout the text, God promises the Hebrew people that they will be blessed with many possessions. God's promise would be fulfilled through an elderly couple, Abraham and Sarah. Through them, the author articulates a theology that nothing is impossible for the Lord.

A similar theology is expressed through the experiences of another elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. In Luke's narrative of the announcement of John's birth, Mary's visit and the naming of John, Elizabeth is portrayed as the new Sarah.

Elizabeth's Story

Announcement of Births

Luke's birth announcements carry the memories and hopes associated with the Genesis stories. Like Sarah, Elizabeth is barren and advanced in years. Elizabeth and Zechariah were righteous people who came from a priestly line. Elizabeth was the daughter of the high

priest, Aaron, and her husband was one of the priests chosen by lot to offer incense in the temple (Lk. 1:8–9). The offering of incense was the community's form of prayer.[9] The priest represented the people in the temple, while others kept vigil outside. Robert Stein in *Luke* observed a tradition relative to the burning of incense. He says the ritual was a communal prayer for the coming of the Messiah.[10]

While performing his duty in the temple, an angel appeared to Zechariah (Lk. 1:8–11). The angel informed him that his prayers were answered. Elizabeth would bear a son. They would name him John, and he would bring joy to many (Lk. 1:13–15). Doubting the messenger, Zechariah requested a sign. The messenger replied: I am Gabriel, sent by God to give you the good news, but you doubted the message. As a result, you will remain speechless until these things take place. When Zechariah's ministry was completed, he went home and Elizabeth conceived. (Lk. 1:23–4).

Elizabeth's response to her gift of new life was quite different from Zechariah's. She was grateful to God for removing her disgrace in the eyes of society. Elizabeth remained in seclusion until her son was born (Lk. 1:25).

Mary's Visit

Like Zechariah, Mary received a visit from Gabriel. He informed her that she would bear a son and he would be called the Son of the Most High (Lk. 1:30–3). Gabriel also shared with her the news about her cousin Elizabeth. Upon hearing the news, Mary immediately went to visit Elizabeth.

Mary entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child in her womb leaped (Lk. 1:41). Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out: "Most blessed are you among women . . . How does it happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you would be fulfilled" (Lk. 1:42–6). Mary's response to Elizabeth was a hymn of praise to God and she remained with her cousin until her son was born.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth bridges the biblical testaments. Elizabeth is portrayed as the last prophetess. She is filled with the Holy Spirit and recognizes Mary's child is greater than her own. Elizabeth's son is to prepare the people for the Lord.

Birth and Naming of John

Eight days after John's birth, the community came to circumcize and name him. "They wanted to call him Zechariah after his father, but Elizabeth insisted on naming him John. The neighbors were puzzled by Elizabeth's choice and asked Zechariah to confirm it. Zechariah affirmed the name and he was immediately able to speak. He praised God for the gift of his son (Lk. 1:62–80).

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Naming a child at the time of his circumcision was an Egyptian tradition that was adopted by the Israelites.[11] The parents usually selected a name that reflected their faith and/or hope for the child. John is the shortened form of Jehohanan which means God's gracious gift. G. B. Caird suggests this name may have been chosen by his parents because he was an unexpected gift in old age.[12]

Summary

Like Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah doubted God's power to bless him with a child in old age. Elizabeth, on the other hand, rejoiced in God's gift to her. The name she

chose for her son reflected her faith and hope in God. She also served as a prophetess who recognized the presence of the Lord in her midst and acknowledged the blessing of Mary's son to hers. "The babe in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk. 1:44).

Elizabeth's story parallels that of Sarah in many ways. They were barren, elderly and struggling to be recognized in a patriarchal society. Both Elizabeth and Sarah were prayerful women who desired to bear a child so that they might pass on their traditions. In both instances, God gifted them with new life when it seemed humanly impossible. The stories of Sarah and Elizabeth offer us a theological prism through which to move into the reconfiguration process.

Biblical Models for Re-Imagining

Sarah and Elizabeth were barren, advanced in years and of marginal status in their societies. Despite these obstacles, God heard their prayers. Like these women, we too are aging as an institute and need to pray for guidance as we discern our future.

Acknowledging our need to pray as a community, the Regional Community of Chicago came together to discern the movement of the Spirit in our lives. Through prayer, Elizabeth and Sarah were receptive to the possibility that God could achieve what seemed to be impossible to the human eye. Hopefully, the Spirit will lead us toward a similar awareness.

In addition to helping us formulate a theological foundation for re-imagining, the stories of Sarah and Elizabeth suggest two distinct ways of relating to each other. The Hagar-Sarah relationship proposes one way, while the Elizabeth-Mary offers a second one.

Sarah and Hagar had a close relationship despite their apparent differences in age and culture. However, the birth of their sons created a tension between them. Sarah wanted to keep her wealth within the family and secured it with her son's marriage to Rebekah (Genesis 24). Like Sarah, we, too, question how our resources will be allocated. Who will make the decisions and at what level? Sarah's story reminds us that the decision lies with each of us.

Contrary to the Sarah-Hagar tension, Elizabeth and Mary demonstrate a relationship built on mutual respect and support. Their story challenges us as a community. Are we willing to share ourselves with others across the institute?

Conclusion

The stories of Sarah and Elizabeth provide us with a theological framework for re-imagining and suggest ways we might relate to each other. Like Sarah, the challenge seems to be the probability of obtaining new life in our senior years. By rereading their stories, we may find signs of hope, for all things are possible with God.

Notes

1 The names of Abram and Sarai were changed by God at the time of the covenant, but I chose to use the altered forms throughout the article (Gen. 17).
2 Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Minneapolis: Augsburg House, 1981/1985) 238.
3 Ibid., 237.
4 Savina Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries" in *The Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 235–6.
5 Ibid., 240.
6 Serving cakes indicated a special celebration and offered to gods in antiquity.
7 Savana Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990) 119–20.
8 Ibid., 120–125.
9 Howard Marshall, The *Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1978) 54.
10 Robert Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadway Press, 1992) 75.
11 Circumcision was widespread within antiquity. The Israelites took over the practice when they entered Canaan. See Westermann, *Genesis*, 265.
12 G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, 57.

Discipleship and Mission
2003 and Beyond

Marie Noël Keller R.S.M.

The God of Surprises acts again. The prayers of many for Mercy vocations have been answered, but they have been answered in a new way. Catherine McAuley's vision will continue as people called by God turn to the various faces of Mercy service: Vowed life, Mercy Association, and Mercy Volunteer Corps. Men and women are responding now, and others will. We can rejoice.

Jesus had a defining vision. He called it the "reign of God" (Mk. 1:15), which might be described as " life as it is meant to be." Indeed, the first thing Jesus did after announcing his mission was to engage others to participate in bringing it to birth (Mk. 1:16–20). Mark's gospel emphasizes what it means to follow Jesus—his call, its constitutive elements, and what followers need to do in order to remain faithful to it. What Mark said then is true now. Thus, at a time when we are reflecting on discipleship and mission, a review of what he details to his community can be illuminating since it is a roadmap of what it means "to follow."

Jesus' Call to Discipleship

Popular practice dictated that Jewish students seek out their teachers, much as John 1:35–39 describes. The great Rabbi Akiba, for example, journeyed from Babylon to Jerusalem in the hope of becoming part of Hillel's instruction. What is more, rabbis carefully interviewed and screened would-be disciples to be sure the best and the brightest were among their followers, as their reputation was determined by the impressiveness of their students. Jesus disregards these practices and seeks out his own disciples as Mk. 1:16–20 indicates.

> "And as he was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, **he saw** Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. And **Jesus said** to them, "Come follow after me and I will make you become fishers of people. And immediately, they left their nets and followed him. And going a little further, **he saw** James the son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat preparing their nets. And immediately, **he called them**, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went off after him."

Mark's pericope illustrates other facets of discipleship: 1) Jesus calls people where they are. Here, some are fishing while others are setting out to fish; 2) He offers himself as an example—*Come follow after me*; and 3) He invites people into a process—*I* [the active power] *will make you become* . . . But unlike disciples of other teachers, who eventually become "master" in their own right, a disciple in the Jesus School is always a disciple, or as the root of the word *mathētēs* suggests, a perpetual learner. It is, in short, a summons to live life differently.

Jesus also calls all sorts of people, as Mark's second call story illustrates (2:13–15). He even selects people with whom others would not even associate.

> "And once more he went out and walked along the shore of the sea and a large crowd gathered about him, and he taught them. And as he walked along, **he saw** Levi the son of Alphaeus seated at the tax office, and **he said** to him, 'Follow me.' And Levi rose and followed him.[1] And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him."

At a time when we are reflecting on discipleship and mission, a review of what Mark details to his community can be illuminating since it is a roadmap of what it means "to follow."

This time, Jesus summons a tax official that is engaged in an occupation first century Judaism considered so vile that his evidence would not have been admissible in court nor would his alms be accepted in the synagogue or temple.[2] Tax collectors, sinners, zealots, and outcasts all have a place in Jesus' following. This circle of diversity is also highlighted by the list of Jesus' disciples reported by Mark in 3:13–19. Within its record are Greek as well as Semitic names, Judeans, Galileans, and a Cananaean. It is a microcosm of the Judaism of Jesus' day.[3]

According to Mark, Jesus' followers are primarily called "to be with" him, for those who proclaim the gospel must first experience this good news in Jesus' own person. It is his example from which they will learn and not from Torah study.

Finally, Mark indicates that Jesus' call demands a response. But while the first two stories illustrate responses that are immediate and thorough, Mark includes another story where a wealthy man is also called into discipleship. Sadly, he is unable to rid himself of the honor and independence wealth brings in order to single-mindedly trust Jesus and follow him (10:17–22).

Elements of Discipleship

> *And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired and they came to him. And he appointed twelve to be with him so that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons." (3:13–15)*

According to Mark, Jesus' followers are primarily called "to be with" him, for those who proclaim the gospel must first experience this good news in Jesus' own person. It is his example (and occasionally his words) from which they will learn and not from Torah study, as was the normal practice.[4] As a result, disciples will go to lonely places (1:35f; 6:31; 14:32f), be in the midst of storms (4:35–41), and wherever he leads, even to the cross (8:34; 10:52; 13:9–12) and they will become trained in faith by such experiences (4:40f; 6:51f). What is more, they will never be "Lone Rangers" but always engaged with other people who also heed Jesus' invitation and embody a response to it with their lives.[5]

Jesus sends out these disciples and empowers them to preach and to liberate people from the forces of evil (6:7) as he had shown them, which is with mutuality and not dominance. He says:

> You know that the kings of the nations dominate them, and their great ones exercise a tyrannous rule over them. That's how it is in the world. But that isn't how it must be with you. For whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must minister to your needs. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (10:42–45).

Followers learn these lessons in "the doing" and after many failures, misunderstandings and mistakes. It is to be an ongoing conversion, a lifelong process!

Mark places the final element of discipleship between Jesus' sending his disciples out on mission (6:7–13) and their enthusiastic return (6:30). For between these two moments, he narrates the death of John the Baptist (6:14–29), thereby asserting to his community that their discipleship may cost them! Mark furthers this point through a series of instructions (8:34 – 9:1), particularly when Jesus says:

> If anyone [disciples and potential disciples] wishes to follow after me [i.e. be my disciple], let that person [choose to]6 deny him/herself and take up his/her cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his/her life will lose it; and whoever loses his/her life for my sake and the gospel's will save it (8:34b–35).7

Mark affirms the daily challenge of Jesus' injunction by putting his verbs in the present, continuous tense.

What is Needful

Three things are necessary to disciple successfully: vision, prayer, and trust. Several of Mark's stories teach lessons disciples must learn.

Vision

No gospel stresses the importance of seeing/understanding who Jesus is and what discipleship entails more than Mark's. Indeed, the whole central section of his gospel (8:22 – 10:52) affirms this truth.[8] Stories of blind people bracket the section and provide examples of what disciples need to do in order to get on track. It is a matter of seeing!

Prayer

Through the story of the boy possessed by a demon, Mark instructs his community about its call to continue Jesus' work and the power that sustains it—belief and prayer. The boy's healing (9:14–29) takes place in two stages. The disciples try and fail (9:18) despite the fact they were given the power over unclean spirits (6:7, 13), and Jesus succeeds (9:25–27). Verse 29 suggests why the disciples failed—they had not prayed. Moreover, they assumed that the power to perform the healing was at their own command and not dependent on their faith-reliance on Jesus, its source.[9] Mark further enhances the importance of belief and prayer by contrasting the simple dependent cry of the boy's father, which acknowledges his own lack of faith and yet he looks to Jesus for help (9:24). It is a contrast Mark wants his community to understand. For in their/our floundering faith life, followers of Jesus must pray as he did: "I believe, help my unbelief."

Trust

Mark uses the account of the Storm at Sea (4:35–41) to teach his community, for some of its members, like the disciples, are drowning in the sea of their own fears and are ready to "jump ship." Elements in the story make a literal interpretation of the account intrinsically improbable. For example, experienced fishermen would never be surprised by the weather in a lake that had frequent and unexpected storms; nor would a "landlubber" sleep placidly in the stern during a storm. Consequently, Mark is making a point that is beneath the surface of the narrative. Here, the sea represents chaos and the sleeping Jesus, utter trust in God's sustaining care. Moreover, Jesus' invitation to go to "the other side of the lake" (normally a six- or seven-mile trip) epitomizes leaving what the disciples know and going to a place of discomfort, in this case, gentile territory. Little wonder, that in crossing over, they experience a storm. But, he is with them.[10]

Learnings

A number of years ago, Concilia Moran, R.S.M., president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union made the following observation:

> In another one hundred and fifty years the bones of everyone here present will be well bleached. Perhaps our ashes scattered to the four winds. But what of our spirit? Will the depths of our mercy and compassion so influence others that they will keep alive our vision beyond their time and place into tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow?

Her question is as germane today as it was then, and perhaps, even more so. So, what of our spirit?

Mark uses the account of the Storm at Sea to teach his community, for some of its members, like the disciples, are drowning in the sea of their own fears and are ready to "jump ship."

More than a hundred and fifty years ago, Catherine McAuley saw a need and got others involved. We are called on to do the same today, as it were, to go to "the other side of the lake" and experience new possibilities. As such, we must commit ourselves to creative collaboration that will lead us into deeper relationships with one another in order to strengthen mission. But inasmuch as this call interferes with people's plans or patterned lives, it can prompt fear and chaos. Mark's message is clear: 1) Jesus calls all of us where we are and is the active power in our discipleship; 2) *Be with him* in prayer and we will be empowered to serve, to continue to bring about the reign of God, which is life as it should be; and 3) We must value this

commitment more than our own lives. All of this involves trust. The God of Surprises will do the rest!

Notes

1 Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2000) 25 contends that Levi's name makes it clear from Mark's point of view that the group of disciples, those who respond to the call to follow Jesus, is much larger than the traditional twelve. Indeed, in 2:15 we hear about *many* tax collectors and sinners who follow Jesus.

2 Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *Preaching Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) 30.

3 K. H. Rengstorf, *"mathētēs" Theological Dictionary of the New Testament IV*, 452.

4 George T. Montague S.M., *Mark: Good News For Hard Times* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1981) 47.

5 John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983) 19.

6 Thurston, 100, maintains that the verb *wishes* implies resolve, desire, and resolution that involves a person's choice and not passive acceptance.

7 See David Rhoads, "Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgment" *Interpretation*, 358–69 for an examination of Mark's two contrasting ways of life: *"saving one's life out of fear"* and *"losing one's life for others out of faith."*

8 For further development of this theme see Marie Noël Keller R.S.M., "Opening Blind Eyes: A Revisioning of Mark 8:22 – 10:52" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31:4 (Winter 2001): 151–157.

9 Montague, 11.

10 In fact, the disciples' "mighty fear" as Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2002) 100, describes their self-concern as they move further from the one who called them *"to be with him"* (3:14).

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A Man at the Well
John 4:4–42

Megan Brown, R.S.M.

She left him—racing toward the village—singing, shouting, dancing good news. "He told me all the things I have ever done . . . and more." And what of Jesus? What happened within him? Did he sit a while in stillness and ponder what the meaning of this encounter could mean? After all, he gave her to drink—or did he?

This woman changed him. Of that there is no doubt. She challenged him to move beyond the close-knit world of Israel. She called forth something in him with which he had struggled from the beginning. "Am I called only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel or is there something else?" The question churned within him. Her brutal honesty laid bare the struggle in his heart. "What is your need for me, God? Ever since Spirit's first stirring within me, I have struggled to know your need. I thought I knew and now this woman touches a place so deep within me that I am troubled. Only Israel? This woman's thirst calls me to consider a greater, deeper thirst. Only Israel? Can it be that you need me to break out of this world . . . that you call me to something beyond myself? How can I do that? Israel is my culture—my flesh, my bones. Israel is the air I breathe. It is the blood that runs in my veins. Israel, Israel, my home, my ancestry, the roots of my existence, the place of my family, the story of our people. What of Jerusalem . . . the Temple . . . all that speaks of holiness and longing; of festivals and harvests, sacrifice and worship . . . the sanctuary, the learned and the wise . . . Israel, Jerusalem? Am I to give up that which defines me, gives birth to me, nourishes me, sustains me? It is impossible. I cannot do it. No self-respecting Jew would go to the Gentiles, to another world, to another people. They will not accept me, even if my own do not accept me. Do not ask this of me, God. The Spirit is too harsh this time . . . I cannot go."

The wind moved slowly around him nudging him closer to the edge of the well. Suddenly, he leaned over, listening. It was as if a murmur came from the center of the well. As he gazed into the depths, into the very center, he noticed the water, swirling slowly in concentric circles, and then somehow, the murmuring became clearer.

"I thirst." Jesus threw his head back to catch the wind, the murmuring now echoing in his heart. "I thirst." The words caught fire. The spark ignited and Spirit's movement burst around him. Fire and water, thirst and flame, a woman, a man, a well. And all around, Spirit's whirling.

Joanna Regan's words ring true for our time: "This is our moment, our time, our sending, our summons!" As Mercy, we move forward daring to hold the thirst of our world to Spirit's flame. As Mercy, we surrender ourselves to the God who "bends and changes, forms and reforms us." As Mercy, we struggle to move beyond our Israels, our Dublins, our Jerusalems, our regions. We carry with us our own thirst for home, for rootedness, for familiarity. We listen intently to the murmuring of our own wells, throw back our heads to catch the breeze and hear Spirit's challenge. .And somehow Jesus of Nazareth, and Catherine of Dublin summon us: "That all may be one . . . union, union and charity."

And so, as Mercy, we dance and cry and sing and surrender, carrying our hearts and the hearts of God's poor ones into newness and freedom.

To the Woman at the Well
John 4:4–42

Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M.

I notice that you don't have your water jar with you. I remember that you left it at the well. You didn't seem to need it anymore, although its contents quenched your thirst and sustained you for quite some time. You have found a new source of life and empowerment in the man that you met here at this well. His presence, his unconditional acceptance, and his truth seemed to free you to move beyond your limits. You moved beyond your fear, your customs and culture. You imagined life for yourself and felt compelled to speak to neighbors with your newfound hope and joy.

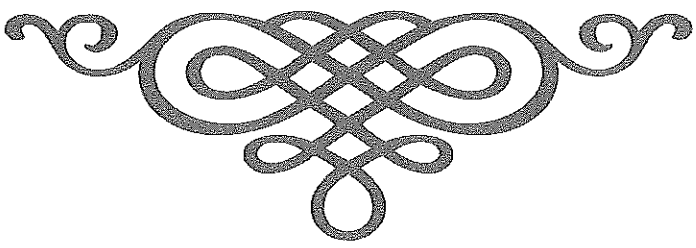
You avoided your neighbors (and they, you), because of fear or judgment or habit. Now you ran to them unabashed because of your new faith and your realization that this Jesus was the source and essence of God's love. Somehow the old categories were dismantled, the former taboos dissolved as you and they came together in common thirst and desire to the source of life, Jesus the Christ.

Yes, I can see that you still have something to say to me. But unlike you, I have not come unencumbered today. I brought along sustenance for my physical needs, of course, but I have also brought along a few other things—a backpack full, you might say. There's anxiety and upset over this incomprehensible war with Iraq. There is sadness at the recent loss of a community member. There is so much love and gratitude for this Merion community with whom I threw in my lot forty-three years ago. I also carry my ever-evolving understanding of what it means to be Institute. There's great curiosity about what I will hear today, even nervousness.

But, not to worry, I have also brought along Catherine's heritage of mercy, Patricia Waldron's trust, Mother Bernard's vision, Mother Mary Agnes's wisdom, Janet Ashenbrenner's courage and so many blessings of fidelity and service that I can hardly contain or carry them all.

Having shared all of this with you, Samaritan sister, what do you think Jesus has in store for me today? Will he ask me to leave all I carry in my backpack behind because I don't need it anymore? Is there someone he has in mind who has different blessings to share with me? Or will Jesus ask me to take my backpack along so I can share the treasures it contains? Is there someone eager and waiting for its contents? Or will Jesus fill me with the realization that no baggage is necessary?

I would like you to accompany me, dear Sister of Samaria. Let us be companions together on this journey. Let us encourage one another in our thirst for living water and our desire to be channels of this life for God's people.



Liturgy
A Force That Gives Us Meaning[1]

Julia Upton, R.S.M.

The title of this essay is borrowed from Chris Hedges' recent book, *War: A Force That Gives Us Meaning*. In that work, Hedges, a New York Times foreign correspondent who experienced and reported on wars in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central America, stands back from those collected experiences to examine war's impact on our collective psyche. "The enduring attraction of war is this," he writes, "even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent . . . It gives us resolve, a cause."[2] I believe the same can be said of liturgy and my approach in this essay is similar, except that I bring to the conversation a study of two thousand years of liturgical history coupled with thirty years of direct and indirect pastoral practice, and invite readers to bring their experience of liturgy into focus here, too. Rather than presenting all that data in isolation, however, I will actually use it to inform this analysis of the dynamics of liturgy and invite readers to do likewise.

Let me introduce myself first before introducing the topic, so that you will have a sense of the experience that frames my approach to liturgy. I am a child of the 1950s, the older daughter of older parents who had both served during World War II—my father with the U. S. Army in the Pacific Theater; my mother as a member of the Foxhole Ballet, touring with the USO in the European Theater. They returned from the war more worldly-wise spiritual people, ready to start a family, and I was born nine months later.

My younger sister and I both attended the local parochial school and sang in the parish choir, where we were carefully schooled in the liturgy through the restoration of the Holy Week liturgy. My earliest experiences with liturgy, however, came in the Episcopal Church.

I spent the Vatican Council II years in college in Ohio where the emerging Council documents instantly became our textbooks. An English major, I even covered the Council for our college paper. When I returned to New York after graduation, though, it was to a parish experience that seemed untouched by the Council. This confused me and left me frustrated; longing for the participative liturgies I had left behind in Ohio. After completing a master's degree in English, I took a master's level course in theology, still wondering if my experience of the liturgy had been real or just a mirage. That one course in the history of the liturgy changed my life and set me on the trajectory that has become my life. Not just a theorist, I have been fortunate to be able to play an active role in the pastoral application of liturgy to varying degrees on an international, national, diocesan, and parish level.

I am the longest serving member of the Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Brooklyn

The enduring attraction of war is this, it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent.

(more than twenty-four years now!) and, in the parish, I have been a lector, cantor, and choir member. For the last twenty-three years, I have been a faculty member at St. John's University in New York City—a Catholic University with a student body of close to 20,000 students from 144 nations. From all those experiences, flow stories that will weave their way in and out of this essay, and at the end I hope you can have some dialogue with others about how liturgy is a force that gives us meaning and binds us together.

The Church at Prayer

Standing around the table of the Lord to celebrate Eucharist today, we look back forty years to the Vatican Council II as the beginning of a new era. In 1960, the congregation knelt behind the altar of the Lord in silence, . . . rumbling toward heaven."[3] We have listened to the word of the Lord and recharged, so to speak, for the mission. Nourished by word, sacrament, and metaphor we quietly return to the "business of our lives."

When we look to the roots of the liturgical changes that stem from the Vatican Council II, we find the Benedictines, with one hardy root reaching back into the nineteenth century to the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach in Germany.

Fr. Charlie is new to the Campus Ministry Team at our university. He came to us teeming with experience as a missioner on the banana farms in Panama, as pastor of an inner-city parish and as diocesan minister to the Hispanic immigrant community. He gathers the community around the altar for mass—students, faculty, administrators, groundskeepers, maintenance workers, clerical staff—all one as nowhere and no time else in university life. Some mornings I feel like Mrs. Turpin in Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation," seeing us as part of "a vast horde of souls watching the back of someone who prayed in a language that was not our own. We were pious, but practice determined that we were also silent and appeared to be passive.[4]

Depending on one's experience of those changes that the Council encouraged, a backward glance is one of either joyful enthusiasm or disgruntled despair. For some people, the forty years has been a time of painful grief during which it seemed that everything they associated with Catholicism had either been called into question or had vanished from the only world they had ever known. "When will these changes be done?" they groused. At the same time, others have lived those four decades eagerly hoping that the changes would finally gain some momentum. They saw the years strip away cultural accretions and affectations that masked the Church that Jesus called us to be. Forty years later, we all look back, but we see with different eyes the Church and the liturgy we once knew.

In order to gauge accurately how much has already been accomplished, it is important to put the liturgical changes in their historical context.[5]

Historical Context

When we look to the roots of the liturgical changes that stem from the Vatican Council II, we find the Benedictines, with one hardy root reaching back into the nineteenth century to the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach in Germany. There the monks, dedicated to the study of the liturgy, concentrated their scholarly pursuits on examining the early sacramentaries and commentaries on liturgical celebrations. As a result, they restored for us an understanding of the way in which our ancestors celebrated the sacramental moments of their lives—the communal celebrations of their encounters with the God of history. Many of the manuscripts with which they worked had been lost to scholars of previous centuries.[6] Consequently, in the twentieth century we had the means to connect with our liturgical heritage in a way

that was unavailable to previous generations.[7]

Although some critics would have us believe that recent changes in the liturgy were originally instigated by a vocal minority of religious blackguards and malcontents, among the roots we find instead the authority of the papacy. We find Pope Pius X, who early in the twentieth century encouraged both the study of the liturgy and the restoration of its classical form, particularly in his *motu proprio* on Sacred Music (1903), which actually addressed a far broader subject than just music. He wrote:

> Filled as we are with a most ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit flourish in every respect and be preserved by all the faithful, we deem it necessary to provide before aught else for the sanctity and dignity of the temple, in which the faithful assemble for no other object than that of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable fount, which is the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.[8]

In numerous other documents he continued to echo his concern for the proper celebration of the liturgy by the clergy and the active participation of the faithful.[9]

In the crypt beneath the main altar of the Abbey Church of Maria Laach, Prior Albert Hammenstede gathered for Eucharist with the novices and other young people who came to the Abbey for retreat or inquiry into the monastic life. The altar faced the community and the presider engaged the assembly in a dialogue mass, developing an experience of "full and active participation" and shaping the liturgy that was to come. Maria Laach was not the only place in Western Europe where such explorations were happening but, for such a small chapel, it had a mighty impact on the way we worship today.[10]

Although some critics would have us believe that recent changes in the liturgy were originally instigated by a vocal minority of religious blackguards and malcontents, among the roots we find instead the authority of the papacy.

Among the roots, we also find Pius XII, who with the publication of *Mediator Dei* in 1947, implicitly acknowledged that the efforts of his predecessor needed to be resumed in order to revitalize the liturgy, and to allow it once again to be the work and deed of the praying community of believers.[11]

American Liturgical Movement

We can almost precisely date the beginning of the American Liturgical Movement to 1925 when Virgil Michel, O.S.B., a monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, went abroad to continue his studies in philosophy at Sant' Anselmo in Rome. There he came to know Dom Lambert Beauduin, Benedictine of Mont Cesar Abbey, who was teaching ecclesiology and liturgy at Sant' Anselmo. According to Colman Barry, chronicler of the history of St. John's Abbey, it was "this Belgian pioneer in the modern liturgical revival . . . [who] stimulated Michel's interest in the renaissance of sacramental, liturgical piety based on a realization of the nature of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ."[12] Michel has been called "the first twentieth-century American prophet of the new Catholicism" as one of the few American Catholics who was able to "identify the problems of contemporary Christianity as identical with the problems of contemporary secular society."[13] Barry tells us that Michel's letters home to Abbot Alcuin encouraged him to make the Abbey a center for liturgical study and writing, for "he had caught the vision of the potentialities of worshipping Christians realizing their oneness in the Mystical Body of Christ, actively participating in the liturgical and corporate life of the Church and carrying this spirit over into American society."[14]

Although Virgil Michel died in 1938, for forty years, from 1926 until the Vatican Council II was called by John XXIII in 1961,[15] the ground for reform was prepared by the work he initiated and by the pioneers he gathered and inspired.

By far the most significant result of the council has been the restoration of the liturgy to its formative place as "source and summit" of the Christian life. The Council cited "full, conscious, active participation" as the goal to be considered before all others. Although sometimes I question the degree to which members' participation in the Eucharist is "conscious," surely we have achieved a level of full and active participation others could only dream about.[16]

Catholics now more readily identify themselves as being Christians than they did a generation ago. Ecumenical services and institutes have helped to create circles of conversation among various religious groups, and religious education programs have begun to develop at least a rudimentary understanding and appreciation of other religious traditions. Evangelization programs and initiation processes are increasingly central to the life of the typical Roman Catholic parish today.

When I teach liturgy at the university and in diocesan liturgical formation programs, I always begin with the root for the term "liturgy" itself, defining it as "work of the people." I have always then asked "Who is doing the work?" Twenty-five years ago when I first began teaching there, the furtive answer always came back, "The priest." Now the answer is more resounding, "We all do!" The assembly has been shaped by several decades of participating in the Eucharist rather than "hearing Mass."

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Altered States of Ecclesial Consciousness

In the years since Vatican Council II we have also experienced what I call an "altered state of ecclesial consciousness." There is less of that counter-reformation siege mentality that I recall so vividly from childhood and with which so many people were raised. Roman

The primordial symbols have changed. Forty years ago, apart from getting married, a woman entered the sanctuary only to change the altar linens or scrub the floor. Now sanctuaries are filled with lay people—male and female. They proclaim the Scriptures and distribute Holy Communion, even making communion calls at homes now when priests often no longer do. Lay people serve as catechists, directors of religious education, and in all areas of pastoral services.

A Warm and Living Love of the Scriptures

Another change wrought by Vatican Council II has been the "fostering of a warm and living love of the Scriptures,"[17] which is reflected in Catholic communities today. Because my mother was unable to tell me that I couldn't go to the Episcopal Sunday School along with all my Protestant preschool friends, I was privileged to join them, with the blessing of the rector. That "warming and living love" was fostered in me then, but it was quickly replaced by confusion when I was told at Catholic school that we shouldn't read the Bible because we might not "get it right." Scripture study began as a kind of a curiosity in the Roman Catholic community, if you are old enough to recall. There was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls that made front-page news in the years immediately preceding the Council, which led some Catholics to dip into the Scriptures as a current events item. Study groups began forming in the years after the Council, as more and more Catholics wanted to understand the context for Scripture texts they now heard proclaimed in

the vernacular at mass. Soon Bible vigils began to replace Benediction as we became more at home with the Word.

Scriptural images now lace the assembly's prayers, songs, and speech. We turn to the pages of Scripture more regularly for comfort, inspiration, and challenge. The Word now nourishes us in a way we couldn't have imagined a generation ago. It is a great blessing, but along with it comes a lingering dissatisfaction with preaching.

Social Action: The Missing Link

The "right" questions to ask about liturgical celebrations are not those that deal primarily with liturgical correctness, but more properly with questions that assess how the community's sense of corporate mission is strengthened as a result of being immersed in mystery—of breaking open the word and breaking bread around the common table. North Americans seem to have lost their sense of the sacramental character of life and of the body—both the human form and the *mystici corporis*. Too often, we discuss Eucharist almost exclusively in terms of what happens to the bread and wine, how relevant the homily is, whether or not the prayers are inclusive, or the celebrant dynamic. The first Christians focused instead on what happened to the people who shared bread and wine in memory of Christ. We have two thousand years of stories about people whose lives have been transformed by their experiences around the Christian family table. Some are celebrated as saints, but others are ordinary citizens who are able to do extraordinary things because their faith in themselves, in God, and in the community has been strengthened at Eucharist. Those are the stories we must remember to tell each other.

Mysterium Fidei: Trapped by Consumerism

One of the most intriguing books I have ever read is entitled *The Silent Pulse: A Search for the Perfect Rhythm That Exists in Each of Us*. In it the author, biologist George Leonard, develops his thesis that the entire universe has a single pulse, sharing the same heartbeat. Using scientific data, he demonstrates that after an hour or so a group of people in the same room will begin to show evidence that their hearts are beating with the same pulse. We experience this phenomenon metaphorically, label it "synchrony," and regard it with surprise. Leonard has studied the phenomenon with the discipline of a scientist and sees it as the right order of things, the "silent pulse of perfect rhythm."[18]

Do you remember the olden days when our culture kept Sunday holy unto the Lord? Stores—even pharmacies—were closed; we wore Sunday clothes; indulged in the Sunday pleasures of visiting, family dinners, and relaxation. What has happened to all our lost Sabbaths? Have we mortgaged our opportunity to beat with a divine pulse?

Do you remember the olden days when our culture kept Sunday holy unto the Lord? . . . What has happened to all our lost Sabbaths? Have we mortgaged our opportunity to beat with a divine pulse?

"Time," the historian Edward Thompson observes, "has become a currency which we 'spend' instead of 'pass.'"[19] People are all so busy that we no longer have time to relax—to Sabbath, if you will. And what are they so busy doing? Studies across the United States have shown that people there spend more time shopping than people anywhere else. Not only do they spend a higher fraction of the money they earn, but with the explosion of consumer debt, they are now spending what they haven't earned.[20]

In an article entitled "Making Sense of Soul and Sabbath: Brain Processes and the Making of Meaning," James B. Ashbrook advances two interconnected speculations: that sabbathing is found in the brain's biorhythms; and that the essential structure of our unique individuality requires sabbathing for its coherent vitality. "Because our essence as human beings involves the making of meaning, the biorhythms of sabbathing and remembering are the means by which soul makes its story viable."[21]

In the essay, Ashbrook recounts a wonderful anecdote that reportedly took place in Africa during the last century. He tells of a caravan of traders that had been pushing their porters hard. Eventually, the porters stopped, and nothing would get them going again. When the traders demanded to know what was wrong, the Africans explained: "We have been traveling so long and so fast that we need to wait for our souls to catch up with our bodies." While Ashbrook calls jet lag "an empirical equivalent" of "waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies,"[22] I think our souls are still on the losing end. Liturgy, particularly Sunday Eucharist, offers the community an opportunity for immersion in mystery—the time and space needed for our souls to catch up with our bodies.

Mystici Corporis and Metaphors We Live By

"To participate in the meal is to enact that vision, to surrender oneself to its value, meaning and truth," Nathan Mitchell writes. In coming to the Eucharistic meal, we testify to our common belief that it is the Lord Jesus who sustains and nourishes us, and pledge we will likewise sustain and nourish one another with the bread that is our lives. That is our pledge to humanity. In his address to the 41st International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in 1976, Fr. Pedro Arrupe reminded us that "if there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world."[23]

Those who dine with Jesus "must be willing to be transformed by his presence . . . to reach out in loving reconciliation . . . must listen attentively to the word of the Lord . . . must seek the lowest place, and the host must invite the poor and helpless

Father Eugene LaVerdiere, in his book *Dining in the Kingdom of God*, elaborates on this concept. He approaches Eucharist by examining ten meals Jesus ate with others as described in the Gospel According to Luke, giving us the demands of Eucharist, you could say. LaVerdiere summarizes seven challenges of "table solidarity" that we could each spend a lot of time reflecting on in our own lives. He says that those who dine with Jesus "must be willing to be transformed by his presence . . . to reach out in loving reconciliation . . . be ready for the unexpected . . . must listen attentively to the word of the Lord . . . must attend to interior cleanness . . . must seek the lowest place, and the host must invite the poor and helpless . . . must offer their own lives that others might live."[24]

Both the latest *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Church's most ancient tradition repeatedly refer to the "mystery" of faith. That is a term we must all begin to focus on more. Many of our "absent brethren" think that they can't come to the table unless they have all the answers and give complete assent to every papal and episcopal utterance. When we put the accent on "mystery," however, we begin to see the banqueting table in better focus.

Regardless of what people may have done along the way, it is so important for them to keep on coming back to the table—to keep both memory and hope alive. The *Catechism* reminds us that the entire assembly "should prepare itself to encounter its Lord and to become 'a people well disposed.'"[25] This "preparation of hearts" it recognizes to be the joint work of the Holy Spirit and the assembly.

Living on the edge of the third millennium, we have come to expect easy answers and quick solutions to questions and problems we barely have time to frame. Technology is moving at such a numbing pace that, before we can even master the latest piece of electronic equipment, it is obsolete. Often it seems that people do not want to be engaged by mystery, but entertained in spite of it.

In Conclusion: What Are We to Do?

Writing toward the end of his life and still concerned about liturgical celebrations, Fr. H. A. Reinhold reflected that he and his colleagues in the Liturgical Movement always maintained that an "internal reform" would follow naturally if things were left to develop. However, he left us with more seasoned advice, "We cannot pin our hopes of a 'follow-through' on another miracle. What we now need is hard work and intelligence (and, above all, prayer)."[26] No small agenda, and even though he wrote that almost forty years ago, the needs of the Church are even clearer now, after having been left to develop naturally for several decades.

"The Song of the Body of Christ," is a song with which you might be familiar. Its lyrics give us the basics of liturgical theology: "We come to share our story. We come to break the bread. We come to know our rising from the dead."

The story we share is not only that of two thousand years of believing, but it is also the story of the particular community's believing and each individual member's believing. As we all know, some days believing is more difficult than others. When the strength of our believing is flagging, we have that of others to bear us up. Yes, even in our darkness—maybe especially in our darkness—we share the story. We share the story by singing, processing, standing, bowing, kneeling, and listening.

"Breaking bread," as is referenced particularly in the Acts of the Apostles, was code in the early church for celebrating Eucharist. We must be careful, though, not to be fixated just on the consecration as was done in the post-Tridentine era, but rather to remember also the Last Supper scene recounted in the Gospel According to St. John. With the washing of the feet, the Lord Jesus gave the same command, "Do this in memory of me." Around the table, therefore, besides literally breaking the bread and sharing the cup, we pledge to break open our lives, sharing our goods, gifts, time, and other resources with the broader community—the church and the world.

At Eucharist, the lyrics remind us, we come to *know* our rising from the dead. For me, that is an interesting choice of word. More often, musical texts focus on believing. Rather than intellectual ascent, this song calls forth our personal experience of having gone from death to life. "Have you ever been dead?" I asked a group of Eucharistic ministers at a recent congress. They hardly flinched as stories from their lives poured forth. Most people gathered together at any Eucharist have probably had an experience of feeling as though they were dead, and then restored to life. This is the knowing that we celebrate together with those in the Communion of Saints who are joined with us in the heavenly banquet.

Around the table, therefore, besides literally breaking the bread and sharing the cup, we pledge to break open our lives, sharing our goods, gifts, time, and other resources with the broader community—the church and the world.

This is my experience of Sunday Eucharist in the local parish where I celebrate. I go to the family table not as a self-assured theologian, but as a sinner—often hungry and weary, sometimes frightened and lonely. I go to be with the folks who walk the path of faith with

me, because they are Christ to me—they bear me up and call me forth. Together we feed on the word of God—rarely broken open with evocative preaching, but nourishment nonetheless. Together we sing God's praises—not always in aesthetically pleasing tones, but attempting harmony nonetheless. Together we remember the One who walked the way with us, whose dying and rising set us free to be witnesses in this time and place.

Nathan Mitchell reminds us[27] of the work of Paul Ricoeur who noted nearly forty years ago that we live in an "age of forgetting the signs of the sacred."[28] Mitchell writes:

> Ritual does more than "remember" or "repeat" or "celebrate" a reality; it rewrites—redefines—that reality. Ritual engagement is thus a critical tool in that circular process of accessing symbols which demands that we "understand by believing and believe by understanding.". . . If women and men today are to access the great symbols of Christian tradition, what they need is not "liturgical correctness" . . . or even "better aesthetics, but a *hermeneutics of ritual engagement.*"[29]

Once upon a time, people used to fast before coming to worship. Although I am not recommending a return to what had often become "mindless" practices of the past, there is something to be said for coming to the banquet table hungry—not just fasting from food, but hungering both physically and spiritually. Physical hunger that reminds us ultimately of our deep spiritual hunger for communion with each other and with God can be a powerful religious experience. What are we to do? Come to the table hungering for God alone, knowing that the Lord of the harvest, who provided manna for our ancestors in faith and who has multiplied loaves and fishes literally and figuratively from generation to generation will again come to feed us in this banquet that draws us together in faith and gives us meaning.

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Notes

1 A version of this essay was presented at the Monastic Liturgy Forum in Winnipeg, Canada on August 10, 2001, and subsequently published as "The Eucharistic Assembly: Standing in Your Presence to Serve" in *Monastic Liturgy Forum Newsletter* 13 (Autumn 2001): 4–12.

2 Chris Hedges, *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002) 3.

3 Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation" in *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 488–509. Here 508.

4 "Silent spectators," was the pejorative expression used by Pius XI in the Apostolic constitution *Divini cultus*, 20 December 1928: *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 21 (1928) 33–41. "It is most important that when the faithful assist at the sacred ceremonies . . . they should not be merely detached and silent spectators . . ." This became a watchword of the liturgical movement in the United States.

5 For a fuller discussion see Julia Upton, "Carpe Momentum: Liturgical Studies at the Threshold of the Millennium," in *At The Threshold of the Millennium*, edited by Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A., (Villanova, Pennsylvania: Villanova University Press, 1998) 103–138.

6 Two of the earliest documents in the history of the liturgy, for example, were only found

to be extant in the nineteenth century. The *Didache* (c. 115), which contains the earliest references to Eucharist and Baptism, was discovered in 1873, and the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, which gives us the oldest Eucharistic anaphora, was not identified as such until 1906.

7 For a complete history see Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959); *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (New York: Benziger, 1951–1955).

8 Pius X, *Tra la sollecitudini*, 22 November 1903 as found in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 36 (1903–1904): 331.

9 See Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., "Lay Participation in the Liturgy of the Church," in *A Symposium on the Life and Work of Pope Pius X* (Washington, DC: Confraternity on Christian Doctrine, 1949) 137–158.

10 See B. Neunheuser, "Die 'Krypta-Messe' In Maria Laach, Ein Beitrag Zur Fruhgeschichte Der Gemeinschaftemesse," *Liturgie und Monchtum* [*LuM*] 28 (1961): 70–82.

11 Frederick McManus, "The Sacred Liturgy: Tradition and Change," in *Remembering the Future: Vatican II and Tomorrow's Liturgical Agenda*, edited by Carl Last (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 14. See also Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, nos. 4–5.

12 Colman Barry, O.S.B., *Worship and Work: Saint John's Abbey and University 1856–1980* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1980) 265.

13 R. W. Franklin and Robert L. Spaeth, *Virgil Michel: American Catholic* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1988) 32. See also Paul Marx, O.S.B., *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1957).

14 Barry, 265.

15 Although John XXIII announced his intention to call the 21st Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church upon his installation on January 25, 1959, the council was not actually summoned to Rome until December 25, 1961.

16 In a 1940 *Orate Fratres* article "My Dream Mass," for example, Fr. H. A. Reinhold described in detail his dream of the ideal parish, noting with sadness that he would probably never see this come to pass. His hopes and efforts were not disappointed, however, and he did live just long enough to experience the initial liturgical changes recommended by Vatican Council II.

17 ". . . to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony." *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 24.

18 George Leonard, *The Silent Pulse: A Search for the Perfect Rhythm That Exists in Each of Us* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978) 132.

19 E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967): 61.

20 Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) 3.

21 James B. Ashbrook, "Making Sense of Soul and Sabbath; Brain Processes and the Making of Meaning," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 27/1 (March 1992): 32–33.

22 Ashbrook, 32.

23 Pedro Arrupe, "The Hunger for Bread . . .," *Address to the 41st International Eucharistic Congress*, Philadelphia, 1976.

24 See Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist According to Luke* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1994).

25 CCC, no. 1097.

26 H. A. Reinhold, "A Liturgical Reformer Sums Up," *New Blackfriars* 46 (1965): 554–561. Here 554.

27 Nathan Mitchell, "Liturgical Correctness," [The Amen Corner] *Worship* 71 (January 1997): 62–71. Here 64.

28 See Paul Ricoeur "The Symbol: Food for Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4:3–4 (1960): 196–207. Here 203.

29 Mitchell, 68–69.

A Surprised Man
Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin

Helen Delaney, R.S.M.

Someone is once supposed to have said, only half in jest I would imagine, that behind every successful woman stands a surprised man. If that happens to be reasonably accurate, it would seem that an Irishman by the name of Daniel Murray who died just over one hundred and fifty years ago must have had at least three such surprises.

Daniel Murray, whose family consisted of prosperous tenant farmers, was born near Arklow in 1768. After studies for the priesthood at the Irish College of Salamanca, where he was considered to be an outstanding student, he was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Dublin in 1792. He spent some time as a curate in Arklow, from where he had to flee after the murder of his parish priest during the savage reprisals that followed the rebellion of 1798. After this traumatic experience, he served as a curate in Dublin where he worked tirelessly to alleviate the needs of the poor and spiritually destitute. At the request of the aging and unwell Archbishop John Troy, he was appointed coadjutor bishop with the right of succession in 1809. Archbishop Troy died in 1823 and Murray was archbishop of Dublin from then until his death in 1852.

Recently, I read an account of Archbishop Murray's contribution to the Irish Church under the sadly accurate title: *Dublin's Forgotten Archbishop: Daniel Murray, 1768–1852.*[1] The author notes that he was overshadowed by his successor, Cardinal Paul Cullen, and very little serious study has been undertaken of his impact on the Church and society of nineteenth century Ireland. The vision, courage, and pastoral concern he displayed, influential though it was in his own diocese and throughout the country during his long episcopate, has largely been unacknowledged and unappreciated. And yet in one highly significant area his legacy has had an enduring influence. This has come about through his association with and encouragement of three Dublin women: Mary Aikenhead, Frances Ball, and Catherine McAuley—a formidable trio of successful women in most people's opinion.

The legacy of Archbishop Murray has had an enduring influence through his association with and encouragement of three Dublin women: Mary Aikenhead, Frances Ball, and Catherine McAuley

While still coadjutor bishop, Murray was given a free hand by Archbishop Troy and carried on and developed much of the work begun by the latter. He was well aware of the various and desperate needs of the people of Dublin who were struggling to throw off the heavy burden of poverty and discrimination left by the effects of the penal laws.

> Murray identified the much-neglected education of the people as a major need and, as a first step, he set about finding religious men and women who would undertake that work.[2]

While this article concentrates on the foundation of three women's congregations, it should be noted that Murray was also instrumental in persuading Edmund Rice to send his Christian Brothers to Dublin to educate poorer boys (1812), and encouraged Father Peter Kenney, the re-founder of the Jesuits in Ireland, to establish a school for the sons of better off families (1814).

Foundation of Sisters of Charity

It was during this period that, in his quest to find suitable religious women to cater for as many levels

of Dublin's needs as possible, Murray became closely involved in the foundation of both the Sisters of Charity and the Loreto Sisters. He already knew both future founders, who also knew each other. Frances Ball had met Mary Aikenhead for the first time in 1807 at the profession of the former's sister, Cecilia, at the Ursuline Convent in Cork, Mary's hometown. Accompanying Frances was her sister, Anna Maria O'Brien, who was considered to be one of the most influential lay Catholics of her day and a lifelong friend and supporter of Murray. A friendship soon developed, and Mary was invited to visit John and Anna O'Brien in Dublin, which she did several times.

Mary Aikenhead was the daughter of a wealthy merchant family in Cork. Born in 1787 of a Catholic mother and a Protestant father, she was baptized in the Protestant Church but from an early age was greatly influenced by her Catholic foster parents in whose care she had been placed because of her delicate health. Her father became a Catholic before his death in 1801, and in the following year, Mary was formally received into the Catholic Church. For some years, she assisted her mother in the administration of the extensive property holdings of the family and developed considerable business acumen. During this time, she became increasingly aware of the needs of the poor, especially through contact with Murray and the O'Brien family. As well, she became increasingly attracted to the religious life, preferably in a congregation whose members would be able to visit the poor in their own homes. However, at that time the few religious congregations for women in Ireland such as the Presentation Sisters, the Ursulines, Dominicans, and Poor Clares were all enclosed and so somewhat restricted in their service of the poor.[3]

Murray knew Mary Aikenhead, whom he first met when she was on a visit to the Dublin home of John and Anna O'Brien. He became her friend and advisor and was aware that she was interested in his somewhat tentative plans to introduce the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul into his diocese. What she did not realize was that he considered her to be the most suitable person to be involved in this venture but, eventually, she agreed to his request that she undertake this project. Conscious of her need for sound training in the essentials of religious life and with his encouragement and support, at the age of twenty-five, Mary Aikenhead and a companion, Alicia Walsh, began their novitiate at the Convent of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Micklegate Bar, York, which had been established by a close associate of the founder, Mary Ward,[4] in 1669.

It soon became clear to both to Murray and Mary Aikenhead that a separate congregation, not another foundation of the French Sisters of Charity, would serve the people better. The fledgling congregation commenced in 1815 with the profession of the first two Sisters of Charity who took the three traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and added a fourth vow of service to the poor. Towards the end of the following year approval was received from Rome for the canonical establishment of the congregation, the first congregation of unenclosed religious women in Ireland. The Sisters of Charity carefully considered both the Rule of the York Convent and the Jesuit Rule in developing their own constitutions. They soon assumed responsibility for an orphanage, established schools for the poor and began their work of visitation in the homes of the needy—the original "walking nuns." Later, they began visitation to the prisons and, in 1835, opened the first St. Vincent's Hospital. Under Mary Aikenhead's leadership, the Sisters of Charity soon spread outside Dublin and eventually outside Ireland—to England in 1835 and Australia in 1838.[5]

Mary Aikenhead was supported by Daniel Murray, who took a keen personal interest in her and advised and encouraged her particularly during destabilizing times of dissension within the congregation

Throughout all this time, Mary Aikenhead was supported by Daniel Murray, who took a keen personal interest in her and advised and encouraged her particularly during destabilizing times of dissension within the congregation and when she was

establishing new ministries for the needy. He wrote, for example, to encourage her in the difficult early days of her novitiate:

> Address to me in Ireland, a detailed account of how you are getting on and of your present state of feeling. Disguise nothing. You know, dear child, I am now more than ever interested for your happiness, a new link binds us together in a more indissoluble friendship.[6]

Mary outlived her friend and mentor by six years but always considered him the father and founder of her congregation and was devastated by his relatively unexpected death after only a few days of illness.[7]

When Frances Ball indicated that she would be interested in assisting Murray, he encouraged her to enter the Bar Convent with a view to establishing a branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Dublin.

Foundation of Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The second Dublin woman whom Murray encouraged and supported was Frances Ball (1794–1861), a member of a distinguished and wealthy Catholic family who, together with the O'Brien family, were prominent in the revival of Catholic life which occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and who were generous benefactors and supporters of Catholic causes.

Murray was conscious of the lack of educational opportunities for the daughters of wealthy Catholic families and wished to correct this deficit. These young women went to boarding schools such as the Ursulines in Cork, the Bar Convent in York, or to convents on the Continent. Murray was familiar with the Bar Convent. Many of the daughters of his friends including members of the Ball family and his own nieces had been educated there, and he considered that a foundation from this convent would be most suitable for his purpose. However the Sisters were not able to accede to his request. When Frances Ball indicated that she would be interested in assisting Murray, he encouraged her to enter the Bar Convent with a view to establishing a branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Dublin. So, in 1814, at the age of twenty-one, she returned to the Bar Convent where she had been educated to begin her novitiate. Mary Aikenhead and Alicia Walsh were still in the novitiate at this time.

In August 1821, Frances Ball, now Mother Teresa, and two companions returned to Dublin ready to establish the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary or the Loreto Sisters as they came to be known in Ireland. Her two companions were professed two months later, the archbishop presiding at the ceremony. Initially they stayed with the Sisters of Charity until their convent and school, Rathfarnham House, later known as Loreto Abbey, which Murray purchased for them was made ready.[8]

In establishing the Loreto Sisters, for some unknown reason, Frances Ball did not choose the constitutions adopted by the Bar Convent in 1816 and bearing almost no resemblance to earlier constitutions based on the 1707 Ignatian text that were still used by all other Institute houses and were the ones chosen by Frances.[9] One biographer surmises that:

> It is unlikely that she made a conscious choice to follow the intentions of Mary Ward, as she knew so little about her.[10]

Frances Ball wasted no time in commencing her work of education. She opened a school in temporary leased property and moved into Rathfarnham House before the necessary alterations were completed. The school gradually increased in number and suitable applicants soon presented themselves to join Frances and her first companions. In 1823, a school for the poor children of the area was opened, a venture that Archbishop Murray had probably not envisaged for the Loreto Sisters, but one which Frances Ball considered necessary. As word of their educational work spread, Frances Ball received further requests to establish convents and schools elsewhere, the first being in Navan in 1833. Seven more foundations in Ireland were to follow by the time of her death in 1861 as well as foundations in India (1841), Gibraltar (1845),

Mauritius (1845), Canada (1847), England (1851), and Spain (1851).

As with Mary Aikenhead, Archbishop Murray remained a constant and close friend, mentor and supporter of Frances Ball. He wrote encouragingly to her when she had doubts when the possibility of the Dublin foundation seemed remote:

> Go on, therefore, and serve your dear Lord with love and confidence in the best way you can, and with calm submission leave you future destination to Him.[11]

Just before her profession he again encouraged her to have confidence in the future:

> It gives me real pleasure, my dearest child, that you see, as I do, in the matters which you have stated to me, the secret workings of providence preparing the way for the accomplishment of its own work. Why then, my dearest child, do you not leave everything with entire confidence to the gracious disposal of this unerring Guide?[12]

He was closely involved in the life and doings of the community even in smaller matters. In a letter of 9 November 1843, for example, he wrote amongst other things:

> It is perfectly alright that the exhortations on your rules should be copied anew; but I would much prefer your paying for that work to your sitting down to execute it yourself. There is a young lady who would execute it well, and whom it would be a charity to pay for so doing.[13]

His death was one of Frances Ball's greatest sorrows, and as one of her early biographers wrote:

> She mourned him long and deeply, but the very greatness of her sorrow led her to bury it more deeply in the Heart that alone can comfort the desolate.[14]

Foundation of the Sisters of Mercy

The third Dublin founder of a religious congregation with whom Archbishop Murray was associated was Catherine McAuley (1778–1841). In 1803, Catherine went to live with a wealthy Quaker couple, William and Catherine Callaghan, who regarded her more in the light of a foster daughter. They tolerated her Catholicism, and, with their support and encouragement, she began to assist the poor people in the area. She was anxious not only to practice her religion but also to know more about it. Her contact with Archbishop Murray began in this period when on day she went looking for a priest to assist her. An early manuscript life describes their first meeting:

> . . . she was introduced to the presence of the Revd. Dr Murray then a curate attached to that parish [St Mary's Church, Liffey Street], and afterwards Archbishop of Dublin. No one could be better suited to the occasion or make a more favourable impression.[15]

After their deaths, she inherited their considerable fortune and resolved to use this money and to devote her life to the relief of the poor and the instruction of the ignorant. To this end, she built a large center in a fashionable part of Dublin and gathered a group of like-minded women to assist her. Within a short space of time, Catherine and her companions had established the works which were to characterize her congregation—the education of girls, the care of young women, and the relief of the poor and sick.

In a letter to a later follower, Catherine McAuley noted that "Doctor Murray gave his most cordial approbation and visited frequently. All was done under his direction from the time we entered the House, which was erected for the purpose of Charity."

In a letter to a later follower, Catherine McAuley noted that:

> . . . Doctor Murray gave his most cordial approbation and visited frequently. All was done under his direction from the time we entered the House, which was erected for the purpose of Charity.[16]

In fact, Murray appeared to be initially displeased to find that a new religious order seemed to be emerging without the kind of planning that he had been involved in with the establishment of the Sisters of Charity and the Loreto Sisters. He is reputed

to have said: ". . . the idea of a Convent starting up of itself, in this manner, never entered my mind.[17]" It had not entered Catherine McAuley's mind either but soon it became obvious that, in order that the many works which had begun at the House of Mercy could continue, the stability of a religious order was needed.

Murray then arranged for Catherine McAuley and two companions to make their novitiate with the Presentation Sisters. In the presence of Archbishop Murray, these first Sisters of Mercy were professed in 1831. Seven prospective members were received early the next year, and the congregation grew rapidly. Indeed, visiting the community in 1837 and seeing the new members of the congregation whose families he knew, the archbishop is reputed to have said: "I do declare, Mother McAuley, I believe you are the greatest enemy the fashionable world has."[18]

When Catherine McAuley presented the Mercy Rule and Constitutions, Murray suggested several alterations, the most significant of which was his deletion of the chapter relating to enclosure.

Murray encouraged Catherine McAuley to examine the rules of various religious orders. "These rules she carefully reviewed and read aloud to those who were to form her Community, where the Rule of the Presentation Order was unanimously preferred . . ."[19] When Catherine McAuley presented the Mercy Rule and Constitutions, which consisted of an adapted version of the Presentation Rule plus some additional chapters unique to the Sisters of Mercy, he suggested several alterations, the most significant of which was his deletion of the chapter relating to enclosure.

Murray continued to support Catherine McAuley and this latest congregation in his diocese. He was particularly helpful with his assistance in obtaining approbation for the new congregation in Rome and approval for their Rule and Constitutions in 1841. He also supported her in negotiations relating to several foundations made during her lifetime, the first of which was Tullamore in 1836 and the last Birmingham in 1841. The Sisters of Mercy spread very quickly throughout Ireland and overseas—England (1839), Newfoundland (1842), United States of America (1843), Australia (1846), Scotland (1849), New Zealand (1850), and Argentina (1856)

Catherine McAuley died on 11 November 1841. Archbishop Murray who had visited her a few days before her death was too unwell to preside at her funeral, but continued to provide support and guidance to the Sisters of Mercy until his own death on 26 February 1852.

Assessment of Murray's Contributions

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine Murray's contribution to the Irish Church and society of his time, but one writer considers that:

> Where the Irish Catholic church is concerned, the innovative, revolutionary half of the nineteenth century was probably not that presided over by Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin from 1852 to 1878, but the first half of the century, that nurtured by the leadership of the more pastorally creative Daniel Murray, coadjutor and then Archbishop of Dublin, from 1809 to 1852.[20]

Undoubtedly, through the part he played in the establishment of the three religious congregations founded by Mary Aikenhead, Frances Ball and Catherine McAuley, he contributed to the incredible influence for good they had and still have in bringing Christ to the poor, sick, needy and uneducated of many areas of today's world. Many would subscribe to the assertion that:

> Of all Murray's achievements, his involvement in the launching of the Sisters of Charity, of Mercy and of Loreto is rightly regarded as his greatest.[21]

Notes

1 Kerr, Donal, *Dublin's Forgotten Archbishop: Daniel Murray 1768–1852,* in Kelly, James & Keogh, Dáire (eds.), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin* (Four Courts Press, 2000) 247–267.
2 Ibid., 248.
3 From the time of Pius V and according to the provisions of his Apostolic Constitution, *Circa pastoralis* (1566), female religious life was characterized by solemn vows and separation from the world by the observance of strict enclosure. Over the following years and especially as a result of the political, social, and religious upheaval following the French Revolution, variations and modifications to this policy slowly developed. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, religious congregations of women with simple vows and a much more relaxed observance of enclosure were becoming both more common and more acceptable, especially to diocesan bishops anxious to relieve the needs of the Catholic population of many European countries.
4 Mary Ward (1585–1645) was a remarkable English woman who in spite of incredible difficulties and determined opposition from highly placed Church authorities succeeded in founding a congregation of unenclosed religious women. Persecuted and even imprisoned for her temerity in apparently defying the established ecclesiastical structures, she nevertheless persevered in her vision. Well after her death, her congregation, which had been suppressed in 1631, was reinstated in 1749—albeit in a form modified in several respects from Mary's original plan. However, her followers were forbidden to acknowledge her as the founder. Her right to be acknowledged as the founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary was not restored until 1909, and it was not until after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) that two of the three branches of the Institute returned to the Jesuit Constitutions as Mary had planned more than three hundred years earlier. See Wright, Mary, *Mary Ward's Institute: The Struggle for Identity* (Sydney: Crossing Press, 1997).
5 See Donovan, Margaret Mary, *Apostolate of Love: Mary Aikenhead: 1787–1858* (Melbourne: Polding Press, 1979) 13–38, for further details of the founding of the Sisters of Charity.
6 Ibid., 21.
7 Ibid., 158.
8 See Enright, Seamus, *Women and Catholic Life in Dublin, 1766–1852,* in Kelly et al, 285–286.
9 See Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute,* 102.
10 Forristal, Desmond, *The First Loreto Sister: Mother Teresa Ball, 1794–1861* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1994) 55.
11 Ibid., 49. No source given.
12 Ibid., 53. No source given.
13 MacDonald, *Joyful Mother of Children,* 242.
14 Ibid., 245.
15 Harnett, Mary Vincent, *The Limerick Manuscript,* quoted in Sullivan, Mary C, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Four Courts Press, 1995) 143.
16 Catherine McAuley to Sister M Elizabeth Moore, 13 June 1839, quoted in Neumann, Mary Ignatia, ed., *Letters of Catherine McAuley* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 152.
17 Sullivan, 105.
18 Degnan, Mary Bertrand, *Mercy unto Thousands: The Life of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957) 192.
19 Doyle, Mary Anne, *The Derry Large Manuscript,* quoted in Sullivan, 52.
20 Sullivan, 4.
21 Kerr, 248.

Contributors

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Discussion Questions

(Brown) "We carry within us our own thirst for home, for rootedness, for familiarity." What aspects of these needs do you expect to keep or lose in a reorganization of congregational boundaries? What are needs that you consider non-negotiable, that cannot be sacrificed without loss of relational integrity?

(Cancienne) "I believe the challenge for us is to embrace our diversity of theology and spirituality at a deeper and much more open place. If we can draw close to the religious experience of one another, we may find that the God of beyond, night, mystery, the poor, the table, the cross, the earth, and the cosmos is the same loving God." What convictions about God and forms of your personal spirituality do you feel distinguish you from some other members of Mercy?

(Crossen) "As women, aren't we aware of how forgetfulness of our experience and contributions throughout history has been played out in a world and church that had forgotten us or minimized our experience as women to the point of 'endangered species' through patriarchy and male-biased language. But, can we not claim Mother Zion, or other poetic characters and religious metaphors to re-imagine our lives and future in the church? If we lose faith language as the way we describe ourselves, the way we plan our future, the way we live together and serve in the church and world, then we lose who we are as Catholic women rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." In what order of importance, and with what connection, would you place these values: remembering women's contributions to the world, remembering their contributions to the church, a biblical image such as Mother Zion for women's lives and future, describing ourselves in terms of the gospel following of Jesus, identifying ourselves as Catholic women in terms of our faith.

(Delaney) The Sisters of Mercy arose as a foundation at the same period as two other Dublin women's communities, the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Sisters of Charity. How is the culture of a congregation different when members go out to the places where ministerial needs exist, in contrast to congregations which are cloistered, where the needs "come to them"? What special challenges faced Catholic women in social contexts dominated by Protestant majorities?

(DiBello) "The re-imagining process has stirred attraction and dread; unease and excitement; enthusiasm and resistance. Could it be that the ambiguous currents of feeling we are experiencing as we enter this moment in the life of the Institute are the waves of heart integral to the journey claimed by each 'woman about to give birth?'" What are the rational and emotional bases for the ambiguity of feelings around reconfiguration?

(Donnelly) "Will he ask me to leave my backpack behind because I don't need it anymore? . . . or will Jesus ask me to take it along so that I can share the treasures it contains?" What are you carrying that can be left behind in a reconfiguration, and what are the treasures that you carry wherever you go?

(Howard) "The common good, then, is not something to be measured and quantified. It is not some good over and above, or set against that of individuals. Rather, it must take into account what is needed for the attainment of human well-being." In terms of reconfiguration, what data supports a conviction that this project is aimed at the "attainment of human well-being"? What data would you need to share this conviction?

(Keller) "More than a hundred and fifty years ago, Catherine McAuley saw a need and got others involved. We are called on to do the same today, as it were, to go to 'the other side of the lake' and experience new possibilities. As such, we must commit ourselves to creative collaboration which will lead us into deeper relationships with one another in order to strengthen mission." What forms of creative collaboration with coworkers, associates, and friends can you affirm as extension of Mercy mission, and which relationships have especially inspired you?

(Kerrigan) "Sarah overheard the conversation and laughed at the possibility of bearing a child in old age. The visitors replied: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" (Gen. 8:14). The question summarizes the biblical author's theology, a belief that nothing is impossible for God." In what ways has the aging of religious women throughout the U.S. become a crisis, and in what ways do the same statistics present "bearing a child in old age"? Are women over seventy subject to any forms of discrimination within Mercy?

(Murray) "Christian spirituality, therefore, is the ordering of every aspect of a believer's life in relationship to the God revealed in and through Jesus Christ and lived out in the Spirit as manifested in the church. In essence, Schneiders stresses, Christian spirituality is Trinitarian, Christocentric, and ecclesial." What are your present, personal spiritual expressions of relation to the Trinity, to Jesus of Nazareth, and to the church? What is your working description of "church" and do the scandals over sexual abuse affect your feelings about "church"?

(Paris) "This, for me, is the heart of sacramental thought—that our God can be manifested and experienced through all of nature, including persons. And, in the self-manifestation of God we can encounter the divine presence, or as we have traditionally said, 'receive grace.' Catholic sacramental thinking also reaffirms one of the first biblical messages regarding the created order, 'God saw that it was good.' A sacramental theology, therefore, is also a creation theology and an incarnational one." Other than the "seven" traditional liturgical forms, name the manifestations of God's presence that operate for you as sacramental.

(Upton) "LaVerdiere summarizes seven challenges of 'table solidarity' that we could each spend a lot of time reflecting on in our own lives. He says that those who dine with Jesus 'must be willing to be transformed by his presence . . . to reach out in loving reconciliation . . . be ready for the unexpected . . . must listen attentively to the word of the Lord . . . must attend to interior cleanness . . . must seek the lowest place, and the host must invite the poor and helpless . . . must offer their own lives that others might live.'" How are the issues of reconfiguration also presenting a challenge to manifest "table solidarity" toward one another?

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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.

If you would like to be on the mailing list, call or write: Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M., Executive Director, Gwynedd Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, PA 19437, (215) 641-5521, email: mariemicheled@aol.com

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

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