

The MAST Journal

Reflections after the Fourth Institute Chapter

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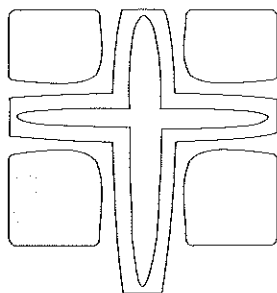
Controversy, Conversation and Conversion

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Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends of Mercy,

This postchapter issue of *The MAST Journal* came together through the planning of Editorial Board member Aline Paris, R.S.M. (Vermont), who envisioned this issue based on the contributions of MAST members who were serving as delegates in Laredo, Texas, during June 2005 at the Institute's Fourth Chapter. Aline was assisted by MAST members, Noel Keller (Dallas) and Katherine Doyle (Auburn), who exercised their gifts of persuasion and solicited articles from women who had every reason to feel brain fatigue and writer's cramp at the end of chapter. Anyone who has attended a chapter knows how much work goes on, what intensity of dialogue takes place, and what energy is needed to sustain attention.

All the more gratitude then to the contributors to this volume, who were already busy women on overload, at a signal time in Institute life, when they composed their articles.

MAST is pleased to produce in this volume the last section of Deirdre Mullan's keynote address at chapter, the section after her review of "globalization" themes, the reflection on "Visitation Spirituality" which left a lasting impression on delegates. While many theologians are commemorating the 40th anniversary this year of the documents of Vatican II, Aquin O'Neill offers her engaging reflections on "The Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*), a people-centered ecclesiology which assumes greater importance as we recognize its contrast with the hierarchical ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*.

Noel Keller shows her gifts as a teacher in analyzing some well-known and less-well-known parts of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. She uses the Corinthian community's diversity as a metaphor of Institute re-configuration, and suggests that the generosity Paul inspired in this early Christian community serves Mercies today. She also turns to Catherine McAuley's relations with her founding members as a model for sisterly relations.

Katherine Doyle's gift for surveying and summarizing complex chapter themes will be welcome by all members who followed the daily chapter reports on the web, but may have felt it was all getting beyond their grasp. The ordered themes also serve as commentary on the revised Direction Statement.

Marilyn King expands on one of these central themes, that of Mercy identity. She recalls historically how the purpose of religious life was earlier defined primarily as dedication to God, and secondarily as dedication to a particular order's charism. Today, she notes that emphasis in Mercy discourse seems to put service flowing from charism of Mercy first, but the impact of our choices on religious life itself are less in evidence.

Another main concern of chapter delegates was the importance of nonviolence. Diane Guerin, long a neighborhood communications facilitator, community organizer, and educator, summarizes the process of one of her recent workshops on nonviolence for the benefit of *MAST* readers.

Sheila Browne gives an overview of the themes for prayer and liturgical rituals that marked each day, including those on Mercy identity, racism, and elections. One ritual involved the gifting of some of Catherine's original letters to the International Center in Dublin. New music composed by Jeanette Goglia and Marian Arroyo enriched both song and prayerful silence. Marian Arroyo sent to MAST the very composition of her "Who Are We in Mercy?" so all can have not just the text, but the notes as well.

Finally, as a coda to all the discussion, Gratia L'Esperance's attention to linguistics promotes fruitful communication by reminding readers that different life experiences determine what language each person uses to express her ideas. Even God in Scripture speaks in different voices, depending on the human situation. Her article is an invitation to listen with consciousness and respect for one another.

A book review by Joyce Kemp, r.c. calls attention to the latest book by MAST Associate Avis Clendenen, *Love is All Around in Disguise*.

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

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



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Mercy in Dialogue with a World at Risk

Gospel Visitation as Response¹

Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M.

Collaborating for Global Systemic change invites us to:

- ▶ Promote the wisdom of all cultures and traditions by educating ourselves and others for global citizenship,
- ▶ Participate in a movement from separation to communion by facilitating communion among the world's faith traditions,
- ▶ Have accountable, mutually responsible conversations,
- ▶ Partner with others and share resources to engage collaboratively in global systemic change ministries.

How might we do this?

Facing the realities that challenge us and the obstacles that paralyze us, we turn to the Word of God for light and courage to grapple with the problems of our time. The Visitation story of Mary's journey to Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke has many lessons to teach us today.

Visitation: Grappling with God's Intentions

Mary, the faithful disciple, carries a message of hope and liberation to her cousin Elizabeth and to women and men throughout the ages. The writer of the Gospel of Luke sends Mary on a journey immediately following her acceptance of the invitation of God to bear the Messiah. She travels to her cousin Elizabeth who has likewise received a miraculous announcement of life within her barren womb. They meet in the house of Zechariah, but he has been struck dumb. The voices of men are absent. No other men are around. Into this space, this silent space, two women's voices resound, one praising the other and both weaving the will of God. Mary, the woman of faith who spent her life as a simple Jewish village woman, announces that the poor and marginalized are held in high esteem by God.²

Women are the actors who hold center stage; women are the speakers who powerfully convey the resounding good news; women themselves embody the mercy of God, which they prophetically proclaim. And they do so in the context of meeting and affirming one another. A pregnant woman is not the usual image that comes to mind when one thinks of a prophet, yet here are two spirit filled pregnant prophets singing out with joy, warning, and offering hope for the future.

Susan Ross envisions yet another way this text is prophetic: "It portrays women looking to each other for validation of their authority, rather than to men." This experience of female solidarity is unequalled in its ability to support women's struggles for equal justice and care, for themselves and for others.³

Mary is a sister to marginalized *people* who live unchronicled lives in oppressive situations. It does her no honor to disconnect her from her conflicted and dangerous historical circumstances, and transmute her into an icon of peaceful, middle-class life robed in royal blue.⁴

I believe that the Visitation offers us a lens through which contemporary movements in Mercy might be viewed. We have many examples in our history of such solidarity in action:

A pregnant woman is not the usual image that comes to mind when one thinks of a prophet, yet here are two spirit filled pregnant prophets singing out with joy, warning, and offering hope for the future.

- Catherine's letters to Frances Warde
- Frances leading a group of young Sisters of Mercy to Pittsburgh
- Frances accompanying the twenty-three-year old leader, Margaret O'Brien, and four sisters to Chicago.

The journey that each of you has taken to Laredo, Texas, to imagine Mercy anew, like the many journeys undertaken by the early band of Mercies who crisscrossed our world, is also an example of Gospel Visitation. You have journeyed here to call forth a new group of leaders to challenge and inspire all to "go in haste" to announce the good news to all and to proclaim liberty to each other and all people held captive by hunger, poverty, and injustice in all its forms. We call on the energy of the Holy Spirit, that moved the fetal John the Baptist to leap for joy and the two women to proclaim songs of praise and liberation to reveal new and dangerous insights for our time.

**Visitation spirituality is a way of
being with people that
emphasizes receptivity to what is
other and different, fidelity to
oneself, and openness to
another's point of view.**

Lorraine Caza, C.N.D., insists that contemporary Visitations require the recognition of the Spirit of God that leads women to "go in haste" toward others in order to journey with them, to accompany and reassure them at moments of need in life, a life that is fragile, developing, and threatened. These moments of Visitation filled with the light of the Holy Spirit lead one to see what is beautiful and marvel at it and give thanks. At the same time, this spirit of love requires the Visitation traveler to keep her eyes open to intolerance, injustice, and violence. I encourage each one present here today to enter into the Chapter of 2005 as a *Visitation Moment* and to "go in haste" towards each other in the days ahead.

Visitation spirituality is a way of being with people that emphasizes receptivity to what is other

and different, fidelity to oneself, and openness to another's point of view. According to Caza, Visitation Spirituality has four interconnected strands:

- The primacy of the human person
- Mutuality and interdependence
- Global awareness and openness to difference
- The necessity for a culture of dialogue.

Primacy of the Human Person

The Visitation meeting of two Biblical women celebrates the uniqueness of each person and calls for recognition that all human encounters are opportunities to experience the sanctity of another. The Visitation is about a woman, Mary, who having experienced a most astonishing call, opens her arms and her heart to another woman's special experience.⁵

In each and every one of our human encounters, we are invited to learn about the uniqueness of each person, to treat this person as a gift to humanity, as someone who carries in the depth of her being a call to freedom. We can ask ourselves how can we be in stronger communion with her in her thirst and quest for freedom. And whenever this person is in a situation of greater fragility, or oppression, or exclusion because she is of a certain racial group, because she is a certain age, because she is in this particular physical, psychological, economical situation, what roads do I walk in order to establish or strengthen my communion with her? In a Visitation encounter, the good of the other is the central focus of attention; no distraction should interfere with the urgency of greater communion. In the embrace of the Visitation, the participants can dream new dreams for self, each other, and for the world.

Mutuality and Interdependence

Mutuality emphasizes that each person has something to offer and receive from the other. "A Visitation moment invites each person to be open to the hidden riches in the other and requires participants to release prejudices that the weak person has nothing to offer."⁶ The spiritual encounter of Mary and Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke is a mutual moment of recognition of the power of God in the miraculous life growing in each woman. "The visit, initiated by the younger woman, enables them to speak their truth to one another in trust and love."⁷

The meeting is reciprocal; Elizabeth needs Mary as Mary needs Elizabeth so that what God has done within each of them could be fully understood and proclaimed. As we gather here in Laredo, Texas the Visitation text is a reminder that we too as Sisters of Mercy need each other.

A person walking towards freedom becomes more and more the agent of her own actions and discerns, always more accurately, attempts at dominating her. In order to be free and to contribute to the freeing of others, it is essential that we inhabit our own house. If I do not take the time to identify my life experience, if I let myself be completely possessed by some given worry, by a feeling of anger, by fatigue, by my rhythm of life, I have a good chance of deforming my reality. If I do not bring some clarity to my personal relationships, if I live these relationships as captivity, I will not have the inner freedom, the space in myself to taste other fields of reality.

A Visitation journey requires the interplay of a diversity of gifts and resources shared among all those on the road of life. Interdependence invites an attitude of mutuality; no one is an expert who showers others with knowledge while the recipients have little to offer. Mutuality and interdependence require attentive listening to each person—the most fragile, to the greatest. It is a time to listen to the words, attitudes, and silence of each other.

Global Awareness and Openness to Difference

Visitation spirituality fosters openness to different ways of thinking, speaking and acting. It is essential to be attentive in ways that are wider than one's own family, locality or nation. Catherine McAuley reminded us of this when she said: "Each place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to when possible."⁸

To value the primacy of the human family requires solidarity with people and their concerns, which leads to an awareness that the plight of others is not alien to our own. There are no strangers on the Visitation journey; all are companions on the road to greater freedom and fullness of life. Nonviolence and cooperation are characteristics of this journey of awareness and solidarity. The Visitation traveler listens not only to words but also to attitudes, and tries to understand the language of

silence. Living in global consciousness, we share in a dialogue with our brothers and sisters from all continents, knowing that the chain that connects the human family only has the strength of its most fragile link, and consequently, any human distress or suffering, wherever it occurs, is our concern too.

A person walking towards freedom becomes more and more the agent of her own actions and discerns, always more accurately, attempts at dominating her. In order to be free and to contribute to the freeing of others, it is essential that we inhabit our own house.

A Culture of Dialogue

A true dialogue is a journey whose end is unknown and which leads to conversation and growth. Dialogue in the spirit of the Visitation fosters a culture of mutual trust and understanding between individuals. A culture of mutual trust requires the freedom to be attentive to the voice of God, the other, and self. This inner clarity allows for freedom in relationships with others and prepares the space to taste their realities. I repeat; this inner clarity allows for freedom in relationship with others and prepares the space to taste their realities. It is my hope that in the coming days, a true experience of Visitation will be yours—that you will take time to "go in haste" to visit with each other and experience this clarity.

The "going out" is not necessarily physical and geographic; but rather, it is an attitude of the heart, which welcomes conversation with others. "Dialogues of compassion, speaking the language of pain, suffering, and loss, are moments of Visitation that require attentiveness to the voice of God who supports the speaker and listener. Dialogue is a fragile encounter

between individuals that, at times, may be fraught with tension and misunderstanding."⁹

It requires mutual trust between individuals and among peoples through frank and patient sharing that recognizes that diversity can be an opportunity for greater reciprocal understanding. Mary's embrace of Elizabeth is a form of solidarity with other women, a sisterhood to which all are invited.

Will we Mercy women who are gathered here, "Go in haste" (Luke 1: 39) to each other, to all Sisters of Mercy and to the broken people of our world so that they, too, can proclaim the wonders and sorrows that make up their lives? Can a contemporary *Magnificat* be composed from the liberating dialogue between each of us—the Sisters of Mercy and the people with whom we work? .

We gather as a group of Sisters of Mercy, in the tradition of Catherine and Frances, at a time of terrible global anguish to respond with God's Mercy in a new and profound way. Being messengers of Mercy, that is, carriers of the "Sympathy of God" is no neat sanitized experience. It is immersed in the ambiguity and richness of life.

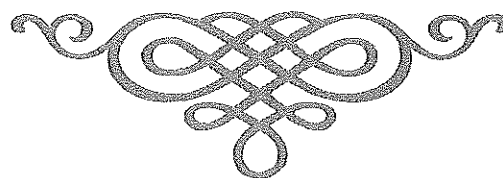
- ▶ Will we accept the challenge to be Messengers of Visitation during and beyond this chapter event?
- ▶ Have we the courage to follow in the steps of Catherine who taught us "Never to falter in our confidence that God will make all things turn to the best."¹⁰
- ▶ Will we have the vision, the courage and compassion of Frances Warde who journeyed to a far country to bring the Mercy of God to these lands?

Maybe today, we can let Frances have the final word about Catherine: "She showed me what it meant to be a Sister of Mercy—to see the world and its peoples in terms of God's Love."¹¹ I wish you a true Visitation moment as you begin your Chapter 2005. May you visit the needs of this time for Mercy. Let your *Magnificat* begin.



Notes

- 1 This text is taken from the last half of Deirdre Mullan's plenary address to delegates of the Fourth Institute Chapter held in Laredo, Texas, June, 2005
- 2 R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmyer and J. Reuman, *Mary in the New Testament*, Paulist Press, 1978.
- 3 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, New York: Continuum, 2003.
- 4 Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Mary of Nazareth: Friend of God and Prophets," *America* 182 (21), 2000.
- 5 Lorraine Caza, "Liberating Education," Paper presented at a meeting of CND, Ridgefield, CT., July, 1997.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Janet K. Ruffing, R.S.M., "Visiting the Scene of an Election" *Review for Religious*, Vol. 56.4 (1997), 402-411.
- 8 Catherine McAuley, in a letter to Frances Warde, 17 November 1838.
- 9 Ona Bassett, C.N.D., Ph.D. Thesis, Fordham Univ. 2002.
- 10 Catherine McAuley, *Thoughts from the Spiritual Conferences of Mother Catherine McAuley*, M. H. Gill & Son, 1946.
- 11 Frances Warde to Mother Gonzaga O'Brien, 1879.



In Celebration of *Gaudium et Spes* The Cause of Women and the Care of the Earth¹

Mary Aquin O'Neill, R.S.M.

One might legitimately wonder why people should gather to celebrate a church document. Most were written in ecclesiastical jargon, and most of the time they reflect ideas already current in the church. *Gaudium et Spes* is different. With *Gaudium et Spes*, or *The Church in the Modern World*, the bishops made a conscious attempt to use ordinary language so they could address themselves to the whole world—not just to members of the Catholic Church. They also broke new ground in addition to elevating ideas that were just gaining currency in the church. For these reasons and others, *Gaudium et Spes* is a document that deserves to be celebrated.

I will admit, however, that such a sentiment is not universally held. There has been much in the Catholic media about attempts to turn attention away from *Gaudium et Spes* to *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) or *Dei Verbum* (the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation). These efforts stem from a conviction that *Gaudium et Spes* was too optimistic about the world and about human possibilities; that it was deficient in its consideration of evil and of the cross. Some speculate that Pope Benedict XVI is of this mind.

While I acknowledge this difference of opinion, it is not the focus of this reflection. Rather, I want to do the following: (1) highlight the achievements of *Gaudium et Spes* so that we all remember why we are celebrating it; (2) identify two important areas of concern related to the document; (3) tease out from the document the principles that have shaped subsequent church approaches to these concerns; and (4) indicate where I think development is called for.

The Achievements

Those familiar with conciliar documents knew from the first lines of *Gaudium et Spes* that here was something brand new: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these

are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts”² The loving concern evident in these lines announced from the outset that this was a pastoral constitution intended to inspire the members of the church to a solidarity with all human beings. Gone was the traditional separation between the church and the world, such that the world was considered misguided and in need of instruction and correction from a church that held all truths. In its place was the lovely concept of “conversation,” often called “dialogue.” Thus, “giving witness and voice to the faith of the whole people of God gathered together by Christ, this council can provide no more eloquent proof of its *solidarity* (emphasis added) with, as well as its respect and

Those familiar with conciliar documents knew from the first lines of *Gaudium et Spes* that here was something brand new . . . Gone was the traditional separation between the church and the world, such that the world was considered misguided and in need of instruction and correction from a church that held all truths.

love for the entire human family with which it is bound up, than by engaging with it in *conversation* (emphasis added) about these various problems" (§ 3). The preface to *Gaudium et Spes* concludes by saying that "the council wishes to speak to all men in order to shed light on the mystery of man and to *cooperate* (emphasis added) in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time" (§ 10).

throughout the world?" the council wanted to make it clear that "the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other" (§ 11). The council sets forth a vision of mutuality in which the People of God and the wider human community have something to give and something to receive from one another.

Key to the Christian anthropology set forth by *Gaudium et*

something that it acknowledges can only be done in "sincere and prudent dialogue" (§21).

Freedom is the first note of this unfolding Christian anthropology. Equality and participation are the second and third. *Gaudium et Spes* proclaims:

Since all humans possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ, and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition. True, all humans are not alike from the point of view of various physical powers and diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent (§29).

The inclusion of "sex" in the list of discriminations to be eradicated is of special note. It indicates a burgeoning awareness on the part of the church, as reflected in teachings.

Practice Still Lags Behind.

Freedom and equality will be ineffective unless individuals have a way to participate in shaping the structures within which they live out their lives. Thus the Council has praise for "those national procedures which allow the largest possible number of citizens to participate in public affairs with genuine freedom" (§31).

An expressed readiness to enter into mutually enriching

The council sets forth a vision of mutuality in which the People of God and the wider human community have something to give and something to receive from one another.

Solidarity, conversation, co-operation. The first achievement of the document was to craft a language that set a new tone for the relationship between the church and the world. Enda McDonagh notes that this positive attitude toward the world was achieved by recourse to an evangelical approach, one rooted in "the biblical goodness of creation and new creation with their universal thrust."³

This connects to a second achievement of this document, one that would forever mark the papacy of John Paul II: Christian anthropology as cornerstone of the church's contribution to the relationship. In attempting to answer the questions, "What does the church think of man? What needs to be recommended for the up-building of contemporary society? What is the ultimate significance of human activity

Spes is the belief that man was created "to the image of God." This is the source of man's dignity and mystery, for in himself he discovers a "secret core and sanctuary" where he is alone with God, where God's voice echoes in the depths. This core and sanctuary is conscience. By shaping a right conscience and in fidelity to it, man attains that freedom that is "an exceptional sign of the divine image within man." "For God has willed that man remain 'under the control of his own decisions'" (§16). Even in the face of atheism, the council shows respect for the human person, saying that the church "strives to detect in the atheistic mind the hidden causes for the denial of God" (§21). While rejecting atheism, the church nevertheless professes a willingness to work with all men, believers and unbelievers alike, for the betterment of the world—

dialogue with the world and to contribute divinely revealed answers to the question "what is man?" in language that is understandable to all—these are two important developments for a church long wedded to a very different image of itself. Gregory Baum identifies a third development, one that has had wide repercussions on the way that Catholic faith is understood and lived out: the recognition of God's redemptive presence in the whole of human history.⁴ Because of the theology endorsed by *Gaudium et Spes*, Catholic teaching is no longer cast in terms of a two-story universe of grace and nature wherein salvation and holiness belong to the higher order of grace, while social justice and other worldly concerns are assigned to the lower order of nature.⁵ It is jolting to remember that it ever was. We see the "secular" or worldly existence as the arena in which we meet God, the great space in which the drama of salvation unfolds. God is present there, "rescuing people from sin and enabling them to live a life of love, justice and peace,"⁶ The struggle for peace and justice is part of the great disclosing of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that is not coextensive with the Catholic Church. Engagement in the works of mercy is as holy as the reception of the sacraments. Juan Luis Segundo reminds us "the sacraments are for the Church so that the Church can be for the world."⁷ This whole theological development was legitimized by *Gaudium et Spes*, for, as a conciliar document, it has the highest authority.

The final achievements I would highlight occur in the section of the document where the Council Fathers take up "Some Problems of Special Urgency." The first concerns marriage, and the second proposed what Enda McDonagh calls the "outstanding institutional consequence of the Constitution."⁸ Each advance was made possible by the presence of lay people as advisors to the commission

Icazas (Jose and Luz Marie Alvarez) were that couple, experts in married life, and their names deserve to be spoken and preserved wherever and whenever the document is read or invoked.⁹

Similarly, it was American lay Catholic, James J. Norris, who called for an international Catholic Church agency to be established "for the world-wide promotion of justice for the poor" (§ 90). This very practical sugges-

The struggle for peace and justice is part of the great disclosing of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that is not coextensive with the Catholic Church. Engagement in the works of mercy is as holy as the reception of the sacraments.

working on *Gaudium et Spes*.

Much has been made of the fact that *Gaudium et Spes* recognize "conjugal love" as equally important to procreation in Christian marriage. The document takes a positive and understanding approach to the realities of married life. Seldom is credit given to the couple who influenced the drafters in that direction. Carmel McEnroy shares with us that:

Most people reading *Gaudium et Spes* today remark the change that has taken place in the understanding of marriage and family . . . Few, if any, besides the conciliar auditors, know the role that one Mexican couple played in giving the document a face-lift and a focus on the couple's love as the core of the sacrament. The

tion was implemented as the Secretariat for Justice and Peace.

I single out these two examples because, in both instances, lay people put flesh on the theory that the Council was formulating. Moreover, bishops on the commission listened to and incorporated the experience and the faith of lay counterparts.

The Cause of Women

I want now to turn to the cause of women. Tempting as it is to pretend to speak in a universal voice for all women, I alert you that I speak as a woman religious in the church who is a practicing theologian. My perspective on the document, on the church that issued it, and on that church's failure to realize the

The failure to implement the principles of *Gaudium et Spes* regarding women is paradigmatic of a larger failure—one that is truly preventing the church from being a light to the nations. The cause is that women be accorded the rights spelled out in *Gaudium et Spes*.

freedom, equality and participation necessary for coresponsibility has been shaped in the crucible of active religious life for women in the last half century. Closer to home, it was also shaped by nearly twenty years as one of Bishop Frank Murphy's theological advisors.

This is the cause of women about which I wish to speak. It is, I believe, really the cause of all lay people in our church. Because we are excluded from ordination, all women belong to the laity in the Catholic Church. I do not intend to argue that it should be otherwise, but rather to show that the failure to implement the principles of *Gaudium et Spes* regarding women is paradigmatic of a larger failure—one that is truly preventing the church from being a light to the nations. The cause is that women be accorded the rights spelled out in *Gaudium et Spes* so that we can make our rightful contribution to the body of Christ of which we are baptized members.

You might wonder why I did not change the sex exclusive language of the text used in the first section of this paper. I did not because I wanted you all to receive it in the original. For those

who have been sensitized, it will be jarring; those who are not so sensitized may not have noticed anything at all. I know there are those who think this a superficial issue. I am at pains to convince you that it is not.

I invite you to read a few of those passages anew.

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

"... the council wishes to speak to all women in order to shed light on the mystery of woman and to *cooperate* (emphasis added) in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time."

"What does the Church think of woman?"

By shaping a right conscience and in fidelity to it, woman attains that freedom which is "an exceptional sign of the divine image within woman." "For God has willed that woman remain 'under the control of her own decisions.'"

Think for a minute about your reaction to the text read this way.

When I did a similar exercise with a class I was teaching at a Catholic college, and asked the

students to mark the statements true or false, they all marked false the ones where man had been changed to woman. They told me they did so because they didn't think the statement applied the same way when the word was woman. And this despite the fact that I had taught them that, in church documents, "man" is intended to embrace male and female.

From all of my experience as a woman in the Catholic Church, I agree with the students. This church, in the person of its official teachers, does not reverence the conscience of women, can only sympathize with those griefs and anxieties that have been sanctioned and, far from adopting a stance of conversation, dialogue, and cooperation with the women of the church, continues to define without consulting and to condemn without seeking to understand.

Essential to the vision and structure of *Gaudium et Spes* is a new relationship between the church and the world, between those whose expertise is in the temporal realm and those who function within the ecclesiastical realm. Listen to the words of the document:

Secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to laymen. Therefore acting as citizens in the world, whether individually or socially, they will keep the laws proper to each discipline, and labor to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields. They will gladly work with men seeking the same goals . . . Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises,

however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role (§43).

It is essential to the life and health of the church that laywomen and laymen, including women and men in religious life, bring our experience of politics, education, health care, family life, community life and a myriad of other experiences to the debates and discussions about "problems of special urgency" and do so fully aware of what the church declared in *Gaudium et Spes*. Of course, it is equally urgent that the clergy be similarly aware of their mission. The debacle over communion in the last election brought confusion and shame to church in the U.S.—in my estimation. Certainly, the tone captured by the press coverage (and I know we must be skeptical where that is concerned) did not reflect any understanding of the mind of the other such as was advocated for atheists by *Gaudium et Spes*.

I reiterate the example of atheists because it has been my experience—on ecumenical dialogues and in other settings—that priests and bishops have developed a great sensitivity to the "separated brethren" of Christianity and to followers of other faiths and no faith, while turning a deaf ear to the voices of women in the church. I have at times been tempted to advocate secession from the church in order that we be accorded the courtesies shown to those who follow a

different way. In the works, of course, are official texts for liturgical use that reinforce that insensitivity by resorting to sex exclusive language even where the original texts did not reflect exclusion—and there has been little outcry from the men of the church over it.

The men of the church who have developed a solidarity with those outside its bounds now are challenged to feel and act on a solidarity with the women in their midst. Before leaving this theme, however, I want to tell one story that shows what can happen when solidarity is achieved.

It is essential to the life and health of the church that laywomen and laymen, including women and men in religious life, bring our experience of politics, education, health care, family life, community life and a myriad of other experiences to the debates and discussions about "problems of special urgency."

In the late 1970s, I was appointed to the Southern Baptist/Roman Catholic Scholars' Dialogue, one of the dialogues set up by the National Council of Catholic Bishops. One year, the priest who did the organizing called me to say that the Baptists had asked to meet at a Trappist Monastery. The priest, aware that the three women on the dialogue could not stay at the guest house but would have to be housed elsewhere, wanted to consult me about it. I said I thought the

women would understand that condition and so he went ahead with the arrangements. When we arrived at said monastery, it was almost time for liturgy. I met with one of the other women and went into the chapel to kneel and wait for the liturgy. All of a sudden a black-robed monk appeared and told us that we could not sit there in the body of the church. We would have to sit in the balcony. My companion and I went meekly, but when the monk tried to usher the other women—also a Sister—out, she was so angry that she left the church. From my vantage point in the balcony—remi-

niscant of the slave balconies of yore—I could see the Southern Baptist men sitting with the priests and the bishop in the body of the church while I, a vowed Sister of Mercy, was excluded. At the kiss of peace, one of the Southern Baptist gentlemen blew a kiss to us! It got worse when the time came for communion. I went down to find that communion would be given through a half door that blocked access to the church. I felt great solidarity with cattle at that moment.

The next time we met, my great friend, John Donahue, S.J., said to the group: if the women have to sit in the balcony, then we should all sit in the balcony. And that's what we did. This action caused such consternation among the monks (you can imagine: Baptist male guests, priests and a bishop sitting in the balcony) that they held a meeting immediately after prayer and suspended the rules for the time of our visit. Subsequently, the rules were permanently changed.

The Care of the Earth

I tell this story because it shows the power of solidarity, which is exactly what is needed to change the situation of women in the

ment of nature. Carolyn Merchant spells it out in chilling detail in her groundbreaking work, *The Death of Nature*.¹⁰ I wonder if any conscious woman could miss the connection in images such as those used by Francis Bacon. As Elizabeth Johnson paraphrases it, "[H]e speaks of wresting new knowledge from nature's womb; of seizing her by the hair of her head and molding her into something new by technology; of penetrating her mysteries; of having the power to conquer and subdue her."¹¹

Feminist theologians, who had worked to turn hierarchical patterns between women and men into patterns of mutual respect, quickly joined the eco-feminists in pleading for attention to the plight of Earth. Jane

in our day. Some have sought to temper it with the notion of "stewardship," but even that term can be misleading, suggesting that the human being is vice-regent for God but does not share in any common life with the realities being "stewarded." In driving toward the notion of solidarity—a notion so important to *Gaudium et Spes* and to the thought of Pope John Paul II—theologians remind us that we are of the earth, earth creatures, interdependent with all the things that now need to be defended, protected and restored. Anne Clifford reminds us:

Our solidarity with God as *imago Dei* does not set us apart from creation . . . Like the rest of creation, we are made of the same dirt—the same elements that are in the rocks of the hills, the birds of the air and the fish of the seas are in us. Our relationship to all the other creatures of Earth is, however, not one of simple sameness, but rather one of interdependent kinship with respect for diversity.¹²

In driving toward the notion of solidarity—a notion so important to *Gaudium et Spes* and to the thought of Pope John Paul II—theologians remind us that we are of the earth, earth creatures, interdependent with all the things that now need to be defended, protected and restored.

Gaudium et Spes recognized our common right to the goods of the earth: "God destined the earth and all it contains for the use of every individual and all peoples" (*Gaudium et Spes*, §69). But now the paradigm must shift. Albert Einstein put it this way: "Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison [that is, the prison of the separated self] by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."¹³ I like that so much—widening our circles of compassion.

Who could have known when I suggested this title to

church. Still, there is an even wider solidarity needed, one that we have discovered since the writing of *Gaudium et Spes*. I speak of solidarity with earth and with all creation.

In our attempts to understand the situation of women in church and society, feminist thinkers began to recognize a connection between the treatment of women and the treat-

Blewitt, who sent me many documents for this talk, has been passionate about this subject for a very long time. Air, water, soil, sea, animal species—all have felt the effects of man's determination to dominate nature. An understanding of God's command in Genesis—that the rest of creation was given to man to do with what he pleased—has been roundly criticized and corrected

Dick Ulrich last spring that we would see played out on the national stage such an object lesson in what happens to women and children, especially those who are poor, when the domination model is allowed to have its way? Hurricane Katrina is such a lesson. In 1965, those who designed the levy system based their recommendations on a cost/benefit analysis, despite the fact that the cost would be paid in human lives. That is why the levies were built to withstand storms only up to a category three, despite the eventuality that a four or a five would hit New Orleans sometime. And in their determination to contain and tame the river itself, the designers unwittingly deprived Louisiana of the sediment that the river naturally brings when it overflows its banks and winds its way down to the Gulf of Mexico. That is why New Orleans is sinking and Louisiana is losing a chunk of wetlands the size of Manhattan every ten months. The marshes and wetlands, the barrier islands act as a sponge to mute the force of storm surges and naturally protect those who live inland. Only now, the barrier islands and the wetlands have been so eroded that there is little to absorb the surge. We saw what happened. The little ones, who had no say in the decisions that created this situation, are the ones to suffer the consequences most violently. And we can see the same thing all around the globe.

The church has developed teaching related to this issue, though I wonder if any of us has ever heard it preached on in any

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parish church. In the 1988 document that followed the Synod on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World—called *Christifideles Laici*—we find this paragraph:

The dominion granted to humanity by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse,' or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to "eat of the fruit of the tree" (Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones which cannot be violated with impunity. A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the things of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization—three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development (§43).

Imagine my surprise when I went to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) website to find they are applying the principles of Catholic Social Teaching that "offer moral direction and guidance for continuing response, recovery and rebuilding"

to Hurricane Katrina. Here is what says under *Care for Creation*:

The renewal and recovery which is to come must seek to acknowledge and repair the damage the storm and the floods have done to God's creation along the Gulf Coast. The recovery efforts to come should seek to protect and safeguard that environment in the future.

I find this misleading, especially when I consider that it is not just the storm and the floods that have created this havoc. There isn't a word about "the moral dimension of development"; not a word about limiting human greed.

Why should we celebrate *Gaudium et Spes*? Because this document advocated the method of dialogue and extended it even to those who disagree or don't believe. The document teaches that the whole church must read the "signs of the times" and bring all areas of expertise to the solution of problems affecting the human family. This document teaches that solidarity, freedom, equality and participation are the cornerstones of a Christian anthropology. They are principles that, interpreted according to the signs of the times, must now be applied to women as well as all the laity of

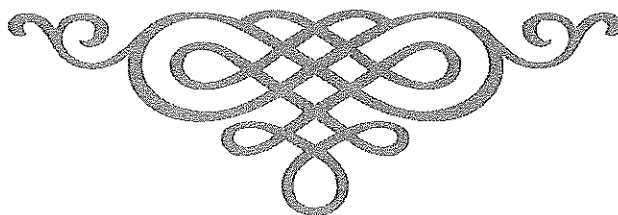
the church. Moreover, solidarity can become the guiding light for a compassionate approach to all things created and an examination of conscience on the moral dimension of development.

For all of that we need leadership. Bishop Frank Murphy was a model of that kind of leadership. He believed and acted on the vision of *Gaudium et Spes*. Those of us who care about his memory and our church are on the front lines now—in our parishes, religious communities, families, and neighborhoods. We believe he is with us in the great communion of saints. Let us bring to the ongoing work of renewing the church his humor, his tenacity, and his willingness to listen and learn in dialogue with others, especially those overlooked because considered unimportant or without influence.



Notes

- 1 A presentation given on September 23, 2005, to honor the memory of P. Francis Murphy, auxiliary bishop of Baltimore. Mount Saint Agnes Theological Center for Women, www.mountsaintagnes.org, 410-435-7500
- 2 GS §1, Abbot edition.
- 3 Enda McDonagh, "The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)" in *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, ed. Adrian Hastings (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), 98.
- 4 Gregory Baum, *Amazing Church, A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change*, see p. 35 ff).
- 5 Baum, 36.
- 6 Gregory Baum *Amazing Church: A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005) 49.
- 7 Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., *The Sacraments Today Volume Four: A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity* (New York: Maryknoll, 1975).
- 8 Enda McDonagh, 109.
- 9 Carmel McEnroy, R.S.M., *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (New York: Crossroad Publishing 1996) 91.
- 10 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).
- 11 Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 15.
- 12 Anne M. Clifford, "When Being Human Becomes Truly Earthly," in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O'Hara Graff (New York: Orbis Books 1995) 193.
- 13 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit: 1993 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1993) 62.



Holding All Your Loves Together

The Lessons of 1 Corinthians 11-14

Marie Noël Keller, R.S.M.

“**R** and R” is what Mercy is all about these days, but it is not rest and relaxation. Rather, we are involved in ‘Re-imagination and Reconfiguration’ with all its possibilities and challenges! Whenever I reflect on what is needful to accomplish the enormity of these enterprises, I think of a story that I have read on the internet concerning the renowned nineteenth-century violin virtuoso, Nicolo Paganini. One night standing before a packed house and surrounded by a full orchestra, he played a number of difficult pieces. Then he came to one of his favorites, a violin concerto. Soon after he began playing, as the Italian audience sat in rapt attention, one string on his Stradivarius snapped, and hung limply from his violin. Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. He frowned, kept on playing, and improvised beautifully. Before long, a second string snapped, and then a third, but Paganini continued and completed the composition on one string. The audience rose and applauded until their hands were numb, assuming the concert was over. To their surprise, Paganini proceeded to play an encore, making more music with one string than many violinists ever could with four. It was a matter of attitude!

Like Paganini, Catherine McAuley was repeatedly challenged as she began to pour her life and resources into the care and support of the poor. She was successful because she “re-imagined and reconfigured” her plans accordingly. From ‘House of Mercy’ to ‘Convent of Mercy,’ from Dublin to cities beyond Dublin, from Ireland to England of all places (which according to the Irish was the last place God made), she moved with the grace and conviction that what she was being called to do was right and that God’s providence could be trusted. It is with this same assurance that women such as Frances Warde, Agnes O’Connor, Teresa Farrell, Baptist Russell and Teresa Maher (to name but a few) left their native land and the people they loved

to go to unknown places where each had to adapt to changing realities to expand Catherine’s vision/ God’s mercy!

Today, we too are called to leave our safe places, to widen our hearts, to create new ways and new circles through which Mercy can be given and received, all the while trusting in God’s providence. We are not without a road map because there is a community whose story found in the New Testament details their experience from which we can learn a great deal. Luckily for us, members of this community wrote Paul a letter after he had departed from them. They asked for his help to deal with the conflicting ways of thinking, being, and doing, for “loves” if you will, had begun to separate this community, and they had to learn the hard lessons of give and take, to re-imagine and reconfigure themselves!

Paul’s response, known to us as his “First Letter to the Corinthians,” presents a vivid and detailed picture of the challenges of the Christian Life. While some of the Corinthians’ problems, such as eating meat sacrificed to idols, are not our own, Paul’s response is applicable in all ages. For this reason, I will present Corinth and its Christian

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community vis-à-vis the wider landscape of the cultural expectations of the first century, highlight some of the problems the Corinthian Christians had to face, and offer the four solutions Paul offers. Finally, I will show how Catherine McAuley used these same principles in her own time, and then apply these principles to our present experience of “re-imagining and reconfiguration.”

The City: A Veritable Beehive

Like so many of the cities where Paul spent time, Corinth was a major thoroughfare. Originally a Greek city-state, classical Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC as it had interfered with Rome's plans for the region. Julius Caesar re-founded New Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BC and populated it with Italian freedmen. By 29 BC, it was the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia (Central and Southern Greece) and the administrative base for the governor. In fact, by the time of Paul's arrival in the early 50s AD it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire with a population around 250,000.

Corinth's charm lay in its strategic location, as it was positioned on a narrow four-and-one-half-mile isthmus that connected the southern peninsula of Greece to its mainland. In addition, it had ports on both the Aegean and Adriatic Seas which provided Rome all the sea connections it needed. Its narrowness enabled ships to transfer their cargoes by way of a 6 kilometer paved road that connected the Corinthian and Saronic Gulfs instead of having to make the dangerous 300 kilometer trip around the rocky southern tip of the Peloponnese. As such, Corinth was the principal trade route

between the Eastern and Western parts of the empire. All traffic, land or sea, east, west, north, or southbound passed through the city.

Besides trade people, Corinth attracted visitors for other reasons. Pilgrims came for healing at the city's Aesclepiion; drama enthusiasts came to its large theater to enjoy plays, music, and oratory; and sport devotees attended the Isthmian games, one of the four great Panhellenic festivals held every two years taking place only a stone's throw away.

In time, Corinth's location brought power, wealth, and a diversity of people, ideas, and goods, making it one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the ancient world. Romans, Greeks, Jews, Asians, newly-rich people, merchants, sailors, slaves, and freedmen were visible in its markets and streets; and cults of every shape (to Apollo, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Demeter, Isis, and Asclepius, to name but a few) were being practiced in its temples.

Corinth's Christian Community Pictures the Diversity of the City

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor estimates that although the Christian community at the time of Paul's letter was small (35–50 persons since “the whole church gathers in Gaius's house” Cf. 1 Cor 11:20; 14:23; Rom 16:23),¹ it reflects the same diversity that existed in the city.² While Paul tells us that not many of the congregation “are wise according to worldly standards, or powerful or of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26), a few people had social standing.³ Crispus (Acts 18:8), for example, was a synagogue ruler and Erastus, the city's treasurer (Rom 16:23). Some members had enough money to engage in legal proceedings (1 Cor 6:1); and others provided meeting places for the Christians in their homes (Gaius, Stephanus, and Aquila and Priscilla). In fact, nine of the seventeen people Paul mentions are middle class and above. Some of the congregants, however, did not have social standing and had to work (1 Cor 11:22); and there were slaves and former slaves in the community as well as freeborn persons (1 Cor 7:20–24). Yet the church was not poverty stricken since Paul presumed they all could make some contribution to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:1–6).

Ethnically and religiously, Paul's Corinthian converts are also a mix. Greek and Latin names are

among those he mentions and he refers to circumcised believers in Corinth (7:18). At the same time, he pleads against members of the community participating in feasts in gentile temples (Cf. Ch 10); and there are some members who are married to unbelievers (7:12–16).

Problems Spawnd by their Diversity

From the opening verses of Paul's letter, it is clear that the community's diverse social, ethical and religious origins have led to conflict and division.⁴ Likewise, individual expectations and perspectives, as well as old ways of doing things have conflicted with the egalitarian standards of Jesus. Nowhere was this situation more evident than when the community gathered for worship. Accordingly, Paul addresses the issue in chapters 11–14 of his letter. In fact, from chapter 7 onward, Paul is answering questions the Corinthians asked via letter. Two of his concerns apply to the point I am making.

a. 1 Cor 11:17–34: Roman Corinthian Table Ethics vs. The Lord's Supper

Paul begins this section by informing the Corinthians that their "coming together is not for the better, but for the worse" (11:17), since in their "coming together" they are anything "but together."⁵ One must be aware that at this point in time, the Eucharist was celebrated in the context of a regular meal. In this instance, the well-to-do members of the congregation treat it like an ordinary banquet. People of status ate more, ate better, and ate first, so the idea of a shared meal with no distinctions poses a problem. Moreover, guests of higher status ate with the host in the *triclinium*, while lower class individuals ate in the outer court. Accordingly, the owner of the house invited his friends into his dining room and treated them in a manner they have come to expect.

A second problem is also in evidence, and is equally intolerable. Wealthier members of the community began eating before all of the Corinthians (in this case, those among them that had to work) arrived. Thus, "have" members ate and drank more than they needed, while the "have-nots" did not get enough. While such conduct may be acceptable social convention in Corinth, it is a violation of their "coming together as the church" (11:18),

where Paul states there was, "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free" (12:13). Nor does what they did amount to a shared meal!⁶

Paul's response to their actions, "I hear (when you assemble as a church) that there are divisions among you" is sharply sarcastic. Whereupon he decries all the behaviors he deemed inappropriate among those celebrating the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, he question the "Haves": "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" With this he underscores the fact that there are certain protocols of privilege at secular tables, that are a violation of Christian unity and unacceptable at a table where the Lord presides. He then re-presents the tradition of the Last Supper as a critique of their behavior and as the basis of his correction of their excesses:

From the opening verses of Paul's letter, it is clear that the community's diverse social, ethical and religious origins have led to conflict and division.

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks (to God), he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Go on doing *this* in remembrance of me. In the same way also the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Go on doing *this*, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11:23–26).

That Paul quotes the historical Jesus in this passage is of singular importance because it is something he rarely does. Thus, there must be something within the Lord's Supper tradition he wants to emphasize to help persuade the Corinthians to come together "for the better." I suggest two things: Paul is reminding these Christians that Jesus died for all persons, Haves and have-nots alike (11:23–25); and, that in asking us what the "this" in "go on doing *this*" implies, and which Jesus says twice, Jesus is asking us to keep on showing concern for each other, or as Paul later says, "to wait for one another" (11: "go on breaking our body and spilling

our blood," 33). It is the only definite instruction regarding the Eucharist that he gave!⁷

Paul concludes this part of the letter presenting a solution to the problem the Corinthians are experiencing by telling them to examine their own practice, and to discern the body, i.e., to recognize that "We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (10:17).⁸ In a word, they are to "re-member" themselves. What they proclaim in their celebration should be a continuation of what they proclaim with their lives. Only then will they enter into the experience of the Lord's Supper in a way that it will become the primary shaping power for them as they live their lives in this world.

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b. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14: The Use and Abuse of Spiritual Gifts

Chapter 12

"Speaking in tongues" or *glossolalia* was a phenomenon in many ancient religions and an experience some Corinthian Christians had practiced in their past worship life. Here, possessed by one spirit or another, entranced devotees would act uncontrollably and speak as the spirits directed, as the Pythia

did at Delphi. Paul indicates that some of the Corinthians imported this form of worship into the community and made so much of what they thought was its superior nature; it became a cause of strife in the community. Consequently, in another attempt "to build up the body," he addresses the issue and speaks about the nature of true spirituality:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the *same Spirit*, and there are varieties of services, but the *same Lord*, and there are varieties of working, but it is the *same God* who inspires them all in every one. To each is given (i.e. God gives to each person) the manifestations of the Spirit for the common good (12:4–7).

Paul underscores two truths in these verses. First, God gives "varieties of gifts" to the community, a detail he highlights by placing the Greek word for "variety" at the head of each verse. Second, gifts are given to each person by God "for the good of the community," and not for self-centered aggrandizement! He furthers the idea of a variety of gifts by mentioning several of them: wisdom, knowledge, faith that moves mountains, healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (12:6–10). Amusingly, he places the ability to speak what the Corinthians considered an "angel language" (cf. 13:1) dead last. As such, he relativizes this over-emphasized gift and places it among others, all of which are given to the community by God, and when used properly, "build up" the body. Then, to enhance his point, Paul uses the image of a physical body to describe the nature of the community as the one body of Christ (vv 12–27).

For just as the body is one and has many members (e.g., arms, feet, eyes), and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ" (the head, through whom we share the same life, 12:12).

Here he employs a fable of the body and its limbs widely used in antiquity and well known by the Corinthians.⁹ Within this allegory, parts of a body speak to one another and discover the need of a variety of interdependent parts. No individual part is able to do the work of another and all are necessary for the good working of the whole (vv 15–21). As Paul queries, "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?" (12:17).

Interestingly, many of the Corinthians had been to the Asclepion, an ancient healing cult center in Corinth where they had seen hundreds of clay models of various body parts people had left in the temple as a thanksgiving offering to the god Asclepius for having been healed. But unlike these dismembered, suffering limbs, Paul tells them, the church is a united, living body and a single living organism of diverse members in a mutually dependent life.¹⁰

Still using body analogy, Paul again addresses the social stratification some Corinthians experienced and which was tearing them apart. Here he defends the weak by saying that even these people have essential gifts and functions to exercise, and he redirects the misbehavior of the “more presentable” ones (12:22–26).¹¹

Finally, parallel to the various gifts God gives to the community, God also gives the community individuals who perform a variety of services for the common good. Like the parts of the body, these roles are individually performed, but God’s appointment precludes any monopoly of one function. Each one can do what they do and can receive the benefits of the actions of others.¹²

Chapter 14

Whereas chapter 12 only mentions the problem of tongues in its discussion of spiritual gifts, chapter 14 deals with the abuse of this gift at some length, since its practitioners were all speaking at the same time. Accordingly, the Corinthian worship service was chaotic and meaningless. For this reason, Paul offers two strategies to ensure a more wholesome worship life: (1) Intelligibility: Someone needs to interpret the message of “tongues” to the congregation so that the others may be edified and respond (vv 1–25). (2) Order: There must be a design to the experience. In line with this suggestion, he offers two ways to curb self-centered, ecstatic worship practices so that their public worship is done “properly and in an orderly manner” (cf. 12:40). First, “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret.” Second, “But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to him or herself and to God” (14:27f). Paul’s instructions also regulate the expression of tongues for they realize that people speaking in

tongues will be reduced to a small portion of the service and that there will be time for intelligent interpretation (vv 26–40). Then, the congregation will be “built up” and the unbelievers present in the assembly, challenged by the gospel, convicted, and converted (vv 21–25).

Paul also offers similar instructions for the practice of prophecy, which he seems to endorse: First: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said (which is a precaution so that prophets will not begin to think they too are a breed apart!), Second: if a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (14:29–32). In both cases, order will be maintained in the exercise of the gifts, the community will be edified and their worship will be authentic and reflect a God who is not one “of confusion (i.e., disorder), but of peace” (14:33).

Paul gave the Corinthians three solid principles that will help them “come together for the better”: (1) Discern the body, it is Christ’s; (2) Keep breaking your body and spilling your blood for one other in remembrance of Jesus . . . and, (3) Don’t make of anything, everything.

Paul’s Grounding Principle of Agape Love

Thus far, we have seen that Paul gave the Corinthians three solid principles that will help them “come together for the better”: (1) Discern the body, it is Christ’s; (2) Keep breaking your body and spilling your blood for one other in remembrance of Jesus, a command he underscores by putting both imperatives in the present continuous tense (chapter

11),¹³ and, (3) Don't make of anything, everything (chapters 12 and 14). But, there is a fourth overarching principle he also raises to help them build up community, and it is this: Live the way of agape love (chapter 13). Paul speaks of a love that a human being can only express and share when he or she has been touched by God's grace and enabled by God's Spirit.¹⁴ It is a way of living to which Paul thinks this fighting, bickering, proud community can rise. Bolstering his suggestion, Paul inserts an "examination of conscience" (chapter 13) as a tool to redirect their behavior.¹⁵ This exercise immediately follows Paul's presentation of "the ways" the Corinthians are pursuing which are destructive to community (chapters 11–12) and suggests the way to use all their gifts.

Paul begins by asserting he will show the Corinthians "a still more excellent way" to live if they practice the virtue he is about to present. Each one of them would seek to benefit others in the same manner as Christ did. To illustrate his point, he uses his apostolic example and, in a series of hyperboles, re-presents some of the claims of the Corinthian enthusiasts, as well as other spiritual abilities (13:1–3). In Paul's case, however, his writings show that these claims are lived realities.¹⁶ Any gift, he points out, is useless unless it is exercised in love. Since: (1) Speaking in tongues without love is merely a noise like that sounded by Corinth's famous bronze gongs and cymbals. (2) Prophesying without love is not inspired. (3) Demonstrating understanding and knowledge is vain apart from love and, (4) the exercise of loveless faith, hollow. (5) Even giving to others, to the point of bodily sacrifice, profits no one if it is not motivated by love, for the essence of true spirituality is not what gifts you possess but how you use them to build up the community (cf. 8:1).¹⁷ Paul's own example also intensi-

fies the power of his words since the Corinthians had seen him live and serve others lovingly.

Paul then personifies "agape love" and describes her by showing what she does and does not do (13:4–6). Love, he says, is patient and kind, which are the ways God acts toward us. What is more, love avoids certain kinds of behaviors: jealousy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, irritability, and bull-headedness—actions the Corinthians do or have not done, and what Paul criticized them for earlier in his letter.¹⁸ In response, he presents them with behaviors they ought to pursue as well as behaviors they should avoid. It is their examination of conscience.

Paul also asserts that "agape love" never gives up and knows no limit to its endurance; it never loses faith, is always confident, and can outlast anything. It is the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen (13:7). Faith will become sight; hope will be fulfilled; love will carry on (13:13). It is the heart of God's nature made manifest to us in Jesus. It is, therefore, to be the object of our striving. Paul enjoins this behavior commanding: "Follow the way of agape love . . ." (14:1).

Learnings Vis-à-Vis Re-imagining and Reconfiguration

The more one studies the Bible the more one realizes that the men and women we meet within its pages are universal people from whom we can all learn. Corinthians, Philippians, Mary of Magdala, Paul, the Pharisees, to name but a few, we are all of them. Hence, we will never exhaust what we can learn from stepping into their stories and dialoguing with them; for what was true for them, is true for us.

Perhaps the thread that connects the stories of the people I've mentioned so far including Paganini, Catherine McAuley, Frances Warde and the other regional founders, as well as the newly minted Christians at Corinth is this: it is a matter of attitude. Each one had experiences for which they had to think creatively and courageously so that something new could be accomplished, and they were successful only insofar as they were willing to put the needs of others before their own. The Corinthian Christians struggled with the lessons Paul offered, because thinking of others involved letting go of time-honored traditions, which were "loves"

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not easily discarded. In fact, Paul was still asking them to mend their ways in a later letter (cf. 2 Cor 13:11). A brief look at four of the many vignettes in the life of Catherine McAuley is now in order. Her choices made to “re-imagine and reconfigure” helped people “come together for the better.”

Catherine McAuley: Heiress and Lady from Dublin

1. Discern the Body, It Is Christ's

Catherine McAuley loved the poor and desired to be of service to them. She lived at a time and in a place where the majority of the people lived in dehumanizing poverty and ignorance perpetuated by laws that protected the privileged few. As a child, she repeatedly saw her father tend to the poor, a memory that stayed with her. Again, as a young woman, she accompanied her cousin Anne Conway on errands of charity in the crowded lanes of Dublin. Here “she first heard the cries of starving children and of those in pain and fever.”¹⁹ She even experienced hunger and cold herself when the fortunes of her uncle Owen Conway in whose house she was living, were reversed.

Later she inherited wealth which would have ensured a life of comfort and secure social status. But Catherine had a dream. Her dream was that she would take a small house with a couple of spare rooms and let it be known on the servants' grapevine that “Miss McAuley has a place; she has some spare rooms . . . (so, poor girls) could stay with her while she helped them to find a safe place.”²⁰ This dream ran so deep in her that instead of contenting herself with carrying out benevolent works merely as a woman of means,²¹ she sold all that she had and dared to put up and open a Catholic institution in a most public and desirable part of residential Dublin several years before the Catholic Emancipation Act!²²

2. Breaking Your Body and Spilling Your Blood for One Another in Remembrance of Jesus

Entering a novitiate at any age is a daunting endeavor, but, when the novice is a middle-aged, fifty-two-year old woman who has never even entertained such a notion and is accustomed to directing others, it is an act of faith worthy of a purple heart!

By this point, Catherine had drawn many young associates to her work with the poor: the school for poor children, the House of Mercy for young women at risk, and the visitation of the sick, poor, and the dying in their homes and in public hospitals. Indeed, one of them later wrote: “She was a sort of Pied Piper of Hamelin. They gathered to her, they foregathered with her; they went to live in her barrack; they left off their fine clothes and put on a plain dress; they said prayers with a zealous exactitude at fixed hours; but they made no vows, and some of them became holy wives and mothers.”²³ All this attracted the notice of the bishop who approached Catherine and suggested that her lay organization become a religious congregation.

Catherine's initial reluctance (to become a religious congregation) was due first to her fears that the rule of enclosure would inhibit her wide open work for the poor, and, secondly, to the extremes in religious practice at that time as well as the emphasis on law over life, which did not accord in any way with her spirit.

Catherine's initial reluctance was due first to her fears that the rule of enclosure would inhibit her wide open work for the poor, and, secondly, to the extremes in religious practice at that time as well as the emphasis on law over life, which did not accord in any way with her spirit.²⁴ Archbishop Murray took the major step of petitioning Rome to reverse a centuries old requirement of enclosure.²⁵ Catherine would have to endure living with the second for fifteen months!²⁶ Yet she chose to go forward:

For the continuity and stability of her work for her beloved poor, Catherine stepped out in faith along a path she would not have chosen, but this surrender made with courage, confidence in God and genuine wholeheartedness, brought her lasting

peace and fulfillment and made possible the enduring contribution of the Sisters of Mercy throughout the world.²⁷

3. Don't Make of Anything, Everything!

Catherine McAuley was a wise and seasoned enough person to allow members in the new community the leverage to express themselves. But, like Paul, she exerted her authority when the spirit of the community was compromised. An example of this principle involves the expression of spiritu-

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ality. For Catherine, spirituality sprang from a prayerful union with God and manifested itself in action. In truth, she considered doing the works of mercy, the "very business of our lives." Such a stance flew in the face of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century convent piety which looked upon spirituality as a multiplication of prayers and religious practices and which some members of her new order found attractive. Women such as Mary Ann Doyle, for example, believed along with some of the clergy and laity in Dublin that without such practices the new Sisters of Mercy would not be

"proper religious." Early annals of the various foundations are replete with instances where these two ways of viewing "being spiritual" conflict. Nowhere was this dichotomy more evident than when Clare Agnew, a woman whom Catherine describes as "fond of extremes in piety," took over as superior in Bermondsey.

Initially, Clare's customs, although bizarre, were cosmetic and provoked no response. For example, she had shorter members of the community stand on boxes so that the Sisters would appear more orderly during prayer. Before long, she announced "contrary to the stipulation in the recently approved Rule that 'the daily duties are the same for all' that members of the Bermondsey community might choose between active and contemplative life. Finally, 'believ[ing] she was favored . . . with supernatural revelations and visions . . . directing her to establish Perpetual Adoration in the community," Clare Agnew petitioned the bishop for this permission" (which he denied).²⁸ An eight and a half page hand-written essay known to us as "The Spirit of the Institute" may be Catherine's response; but, if not, it is at least applicable to what went on there.²⁹ For had Clare succeeded, the Bermondsey community would have gone off in a different direction and not been faithful to Catherine's founding inspiration. Listen to Catherine describe and explain what she believes to be the essence of the call to Mercy:

We should often reflect that our progress in the spiritual life consists in the faithful discharge of the duties belonging to our state, as regards both ourselves and our neighbor, and we must consider the time and exertion we employ for the relief and instruction of the poor and ignorant as most conducive to our own advancement in perfection; and the time given to prayer and all other pious exercises, we must consider as employed to obtain the grace, strength and animation which alone could enable us to persevere in the meritorious obligation of our state, and if we were to neglect these means of obtaining divine support, we would deserve that God should stop the course of his graces, to make us sensible that all our efforts would be fruitless, except we were continually rewarded, and replenished with his Divine Spirit . . .

. . . the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which draw religious from a life of contemplation, so far from separating them from the love of God, unite them more closely to him, and render them more valuable in his holy service."³⁰

4. Live the Way of Agape Love

Catherine McAuley taught others by word and by example. What she said and did was written on the same page. As such, she was a woman of excellence. Indeed, all of the first-hand reports written by her earliest associates comment on her approachability and naturalness, her liveliness and cheerfulness, her kindness and solicitude for each Sister and her unpretentious way of being in their midst.³¹ As one of her novices later stated: The ideal she fashioned with words walked before us daily.³²

Catherine's warmth for the Sisters knew no bounds and she continued to guide and encourage them as they moved away from Dublin via the letters she wrote which she called her "Foundation Circulars." Here, she kept the various houses in touch with her and with each other. Although writing letters would not have been easy, given her many cares and concerns, she made the time to maintain vital connection with all the Sisters and their missions!

Despite the inconvenience of travel, Catherine visited her Sisters in the new convents and encouraged others to do the same.³³ Such self-sacrificing love could hardly go unnoticed. The bishop of Galway, for example, observing Catherine had made the exhausting two day travel over rough roads to make a new foundation there and then return with others six months later to attend the Clothing Ceremony of the three Galway Postulants comments:

It is impossible that the Order of Mercy should fail, where there is such unity, and such affectionate interest is maintained, as brings them one hundred miles to encourage and aid one another; and this is their established practice—to look after what has been newly commenced.³⁴

Catherine's practical alertness to others' needs is also in evidence as she lay dying. She was distressed by the pain her passing would inflict on the Sisters rather than by her own discomfort. Indeed, her famous remark, "The sisters are tired, be sure they have a good cup of tea when I am gone," is evidence of her concern.³⁵ But it is more than that! For several years ago, I visited the Georgian "Number 29 House" an exhibition of "Home Life in Dublin 1790–1820" which is a few blocks from the Mercy International Centre in Dublin. Upon entering, visitors are escorted into a small room where the nineteenth-century lady of the house welcomes you via filmstrip. She also encourages you to have some

tea and scones after the tour, with the aside that in her day she asked her maid to take each teaspoon of loose tea and stretch it to get as many cups out of it as she could because tea was expensive. Afterwards, I asked the docent how long tea was expensive in Ireland. "Until 1850," she replied. "In fact, the price of one pound of tea equaled a servant's wage for a year. It was so expensive; it was locked up in a chest!" Instantly, Catherine's final words, "The sisters are tired, be sure they have a good cup of tea when I am gone" took on new meaning; for her "good cup of tea," a tea that would bring them comfort, means that it was undiluted! What an enormous example of Catherine's agape love!

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Sisters and Associates 2005: Heirs of Catherine

1. Discern the Body, It Is Christ's.

Last fall eight hundred forty-seven women and men from the five continents of the world gathered at the Congress on Consecrated Life in Rome. Among the virtues this assembly discerned were necessary in today's society were the qualities of boldness and creativity. To me, they are the virtues necessary to "re-imagine and reconfigure." What is more, the congress also affirmed that "Consecrated Life must reach beyond the boundaries of

our institutes and join with lay sisters and brothers who share our charisms, in such a way that we identify ourselves not as an order but as a family, sharing life and mission." It is where we are now! Re-imagining prods us further. The Spirit has called Sisters, Associates, Mercy Corps Volunteers and Companions of Mercy to share in the charism of Mercy. And although vowed profession is distinct in character and meaning, all four entities are unique manifestations of the Spirit and have a place at Mercy's table.

2. Keep breaking your body and spilling your blood for one another in remembrance of Jesus.

To be open to what the Spirit wants now, we need to find and celebrate ways to become one, to continue Catherine's work and for the Gospel. Indeed, the Fourth Institute Chapter recently affirmed "the creation of a process that would explore how all who intentionally embrace the call to be Mercy could come together in collaboration to discern responses to the needs of our time." In so doing, we will all, like the Corinthians, have to learn lessons of give and take; yet the more we engage in this process, the more we will call out different gifts from one another, for the good of the whole.

3. Don't Make of Anything, Everything!

A card I received recently describes the essence of imagination. It pictures an iceberg, from above and below saying: "What we can easily see is only a small percentage of what is possible. Imagination is having the vision to see what is just below the surface; to picture that which is essential, but invisible to the eye. What an exciting adventure! Perhaps another way of working toward this truth is this: none of us can be caught up with our own part of

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the picture; instead we must focus on the whole picture. It is a matter of attitude!

4. Live the Way of Agape Love.

Like Catherine, our warmth for each other can know no bounds. As such, we must grow in our ability to live agape love, which as Paul describes: never gives up, knows no limit to its endurance, never loses faith, is always confident, and can outlast anything. The secret to living such love is learning how to keep our three loves in balance, which as Jesus tells us are God, others, and ourselves. Paul shows us the way. Balance God: Know the part you've been given to play in this life and play it, which is after all authentic worship (1 Corinthians 12). In so doing, one will never make of anything, everything (1 Corinthians 14). Balance Others: Discern the body it is Christ's (1 Cor 11:17-34). Balance self: for what you think about yourself is reflected in how you treat others (1 Corinthians 13). Learning these lessons is, in short, living in right relationship.

I began these reflections on ways to meet the challenges and possibilities facing us today with the person of Paginini and his experience of reconfiguring his Stradivarius. It is an impressive story; however, when I researched its veracity, I discovered that he regularly performed this feat in order to dazzle audiences by his prowess. A sad truth! Surely, the process we are engaged in has not been commenced in order to dazzle. Rather, it was initiated so that we could "come together for the better." The strength we need to do this resides at the table. A favorite poem says it best.

*The Kingdom of God is like a seed planted in a person's heart
slowly, silently stretching it
beyond family and friends, church and nation
until one day that heart bursts open
revealing a Table
wider than the world
warm as an intimate embrace.*

*To this Table everyone is invited
No one is stranger, no one unfit;
Each brings a gift, work of one's hands, heart, mind
—a morsel for the Table—
and there is always enough*

enough because no one keeps hidden the
bread of the morrow;
enough because in the sharing is the
miracle of multiplication.

Around this Table everyone eats
and no one is stuffed;
each sips deeply of love unearned
and offers the cup to another.

From this Table each rises
strengthened by a morsel and a sip
heart seeded
pregnant.

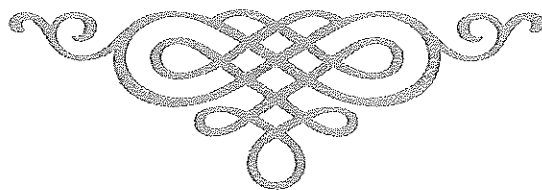
John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*

Notes



- 1 Nine people fit into a *triclinium* (dining room) of a well-to-do house in the Roman Era. An additional thirty to forty people fit into the *atrium* (outer court).
- 2 *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1987) 156–57.
- 3 See Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. by John H. Schütz. *Studies in the New Testament and Its World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982) 69–70. Derek Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament*, *Biblical Classics Library* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997) also thinks that Pauline Christianity was a movement that included different classes of people.
- 4 See Barbara Bowe, R.S.C.J., “Paul and First Corinthians” *The Bible Today* (Vol. 35:5, 1997) 268–274 for an overview of Paul’s Letter.
- 5 The verb “gather together,” is repeated five times in vv 17–22 and 33–34 and is the term that holds the argument together. Given its similar usage in 14:23 and 26, it had probably become a semitechnical term for the “gathering together” of the people of God for worship. Paul is concerned with what goes on when they “come together as the church” (v 18). Their problem is not their failure to gather, but in not being God’s *new people* when they gathered.
- 6 Indeed, the Corinthian’s behavior mirrors the social stratification present in the city of Corinth itself. As a result, their celebration is no longer a common supper but an experience that fragments the community.
- 7 Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People. Eucharist in the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Press, 1997) 169, claims: To celebrate Eucharist is to commit oneself to a discipleship that “remembers” Jesus—not only in the breaking of the ritual bread and the sharing of the ritual cup but also in “imitation” of Jesus, in the ongoing breaking of one’s own body and spilling of one’s blood “in remembrance” of Jesus.
- 8 Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*. *New Testament Message* 10 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982) 114 contends that the “discernment of the body” which Paul demands is the affirmation in action of the organic unity of the community.
- 9 See Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 84 for instances of how the fable of “the body” was used in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds.
- 10 Kevin Quast, *Reading The Corinthian Correspondence: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984) 80.
- 11 Witherington, 259 proposes that in this section Paul is taking a whack at the *cursus honorum*, the pecking order of power and dignity in a Roman colony.
- 12 William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* *Anchor Bible* 32 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 288.
- 13 Witherington, 272.
- 14 To the Corinthians, tongues, wisdom, and knowledge are the keys to being spiritual, whereas for Paul “being spiritual” means to be full of the Spirit, or to behave “as those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be his holy people” (1:2); to “walk in love.” Thus, 1 Corinthians 13 is an examination of conscience.
- 15 See C. A. Holladay, “1 Corinthians 13: Paul as Apostolic Paradigm,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians. Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, and Wayne Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 89–91 for examples.
- 16 Quast, 82.
- 17 Boasting, e.g., was a major problem in Corinth. Various factions claimed their leader was “the best preacher” or “the most spiritual.” As a result, self-centered attitudes turned the church from a supportive environment into a conglomeration of various warring camps! Living lives of agape love is his antidote.
- 18 M. Joanna Regan R.S.M., Isabelle Keiss, *Tender Courage: A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine McAuley, first Sister of Mercy* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988) 9.
- 19 Sister Mary Carmel Bourke R.S.M., *A Woman Sings of Mercy. Reflections on the Life and Spirit of Mother*

- Catherine McAuley Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy* (Sydney, Australia: E. J. Dwyer, 1988) 19.
- 20 Marie Gaudry, R.S.M., *With Catherine, my Spirit Mother. A Retreat with Catherine McAuley for Sisters of Mercy and for those Inspired by Mercy* (Castle Hill, N.S.W.: Marymount Mercy Centre, 1999) 10.
 - 21 Mary Aquin O'Neill R.S.M., "Ecclesial Challenges for the Sisters of Mercy in the 21st Century," in *MAST* (vol. 14, no 2, 2004) 2 notes that because Catherine saw something that wasn't being done by the church for those close to her heart (i.e., unprotected women, the sick, and the poor), she found a way to get it done; for she saw that she was responsible for this part of the Body of Christ. In fact, Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 102 states: Catherine had "much difficulty in obtaining the ground, for the Protestants in the neighbourhood were opposed to it, supposing that an establishment for the relief of the poor would injure the locality; however, she succeeded, and the house was completed in the beginning of the year 1827."
 - 22 Bessie R. Belloc, *Mrs. McAuley, Historic Nuns* (London: Duckworth, 1898) 87.
 - 23 Gaudry, 18. Cf. Regan and Keiss, 37–39.
 - 24 Gaudry, 18.
 - 25 That she stayed at George's Hill is also a daily tribute to Catherine's commitment, for her novice mistress represented the essence of conventual life as it had repelled her!
 - 26 Gaudry, 18. Indeed, Mother M. Clare Moore later wrote that Catherine "often said it was so hard a struggle for her to remain on account of meeting there many things repugnant to her feelings, that had she not the establishment of the Institute most deeply at heart she would that very evening [she entered Presentation Convent] have sent for a coach to take her back to Baggot Street." Cf. Sister M Bertrand Degnan R.S.M., *Mercy Unto Thousands* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957) 113–114.
 - 27 Regan and Keiss, 108–109.
 - 28 Mary C. Sullivan R.S.M., "Catherine McAuley's Theological and Literary Debt to Alonso Rodriguez: The 'Spirit Of The Institute' Parallels" in *Recusant History* (Vol. 20, May 1990) 104 note 1 asserts that while Catherine's handwritten manuscript of this document is in Bermondsey, there is another undated manuscript of the same essay, also in Catherine's handwriting, found in a notebook which appears to be of an earlier date, in the archives of the Dublin community at Carysfort Park, Blackrock.
 - 29 *Collected Letters of Catherine McAuley*. Edited by Sister Mary Ignatia Neumann R.S.M. (Baltimore: Helicon 1969) 385ff.
 - 30 Gaudry, 45.
 - 32 Mother M. Vincent Hartnett R.S.M., *The Life of Rev. Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Order of Mercy* (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1863) 191.
 - 33 Indeed, in a letter sent to Francis Warde on October 12, 1840 Catherine comments on the rigors of travel herself. Cf. Neumann, 236–238.
 - 34 Neumann, 332.
 - 35 Mary Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 387 note 17 avers "This request to Theresa Carton, which Catherine Makes as she is dying, is the source of the 'good cup of tea' tradition among Sisters of Mercy. M Austin Carroll calls it "a comfortable cup of tea" (Life, 436).



Out of God's Deepest Mercy, a New Dawn

Reflections on the Fourth Institute Chapter

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

A General Chapter, a Kairos Moment; a time when the Spirit invites you to attend to the movements of God within this universe, the household of God; a time when the Spirit gifts you to be judicious discerners of God's will for you as a distinct ecclesial community within the Church, and a time when, together, you are graced to be midwives of the Institute's never-ceasing birth.¹

With these words Sister Mary Daniel Turner, S.N.DdeN., described what might come to be called "The Laredo experience."

As days and weeks pass, words fade and details become dim but the searing impression of the experience lives on, growing in transformative power as it is watered with contemplative reflection and action throughout our Institute. In regional assemblies and gatherings, the meaning and implications of our chapter are being recalled, examined, and integrated into the life of the whole. Nevertheless, no experience can be fully replicated. No experience is exactly the same even for those who share it. The riches and insight the experience holds must be discovered in the stories of those who participated for "to remember is to make present." To claim the treasures of the Fourth Institute Chapter, we must enter into a time of storytelling with the

250 plus participants who journeyed together, a storytelling that invites all of us to remember when we have been touched by such movements of the Spirit.

Like cloudy waters that become clear when standing in stillness, my marquee memories and impressions of the chapter have emerged over time: the felt presence of the Spirit as chapter participants struggled to listen to God's deepest desiring; the call to conversion and action arising from our visit to the *colonias*; the welcoming hospitality of the Laredo community; the quiet, profound witness of Sister Mary deLellis Trevino; the sacredness of our election process; the entrustment of Catherine's letters to Mercy International; the gift of our multicultural and international expression of Mercy; the global sweep of the opening address by

Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M.; the expansiveness of the night sky, the pain of owning our corporate contribution to racism; the reality of Eucharistic famine, the struggle to say, "Who are we in Mercy?"; Marie Chin's gentle goodbye, the power and rightness of our commitment to non-violence and support of immigrant peoples.

There are also areas that remain cloudy, leaving the heart with a sense of disquiet: the inability of the chapter body to clearly name and explore its concerns relating to our incorporation process; the underlying tension relating to the locus of authority in multiple areas of Institute life; the recurring concern that our movement to re-configured communities might reduce members' voice and ability to influence our shared future. Darkness and dawning

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together danced to the music of hope and uncertainty.

While each chapter memory contains an invitation to contemplation and conversion, collectively they paint a portrait of "What Mercy May Yet Be."² Collectively, the chapter experience

colonnias or neighborhoods are unincorporated developments that have been left without basic infrastructure such as water and utilities. For fifteen years, the people in this *colonnias* have had to carry water to their homes from community tanks because

sion, and desperation make themselves at home.

Mercy Ministries, sponsored by the St. Louis Regional Community, serves the people of the *colonnias*. Mercy Ministries' ability to reach out to the people with concrete service and compassion was a vivid reminder of what Mercy is, the enfleshment of our compassionate God. Catherine McAuley connected the rich with the poor. The presence at San Carlos of Texas politicians, INS officials, police, and Mercy ministers showed what can happen when collaboration and partnering for the sake of mission occurs. It engendered within me both a sense of joy and admiration for what my Sisters with their collaborators are doing and a realization that I could do much more to serve those in need.

The experience of the *colonnias* stood out all the more when contrasted with the evening for chapter participants hosted at Lago del Rio Country Club. This wonderful event presented another world, one of lush fountains, a spectacular view of the Rio Grande, abundant food, and exclusivity. It is only a few miles from the *colonnias* but eons away in its reality. The gift of the evening was a tangible reminder that we, as Sisters of Mercy, move between these two worlds, one of privilege and one of want. How we move in this reality determines whether we get co-opted by the dominant culture or act as leaven within it. The call to be bridge builder is part of the DNA of Mercy. It requires of us the willingness to constantly live in the gap.

The *colonnias* of Laredo are not singular. They are multiplied in a hundred ways in cities and towns across the United States . . . The *colonnias* are an echo of the world's myriad neighborhoods where poverty, oppression, and desperation make themselves at home.

challenges us to examine five interrelated areas: solidarity with those who are economically poor; interdependency with Earth and each other; communion in sisterhood; contemplative listening and prophetic witness, and Mercy identity. The meaning and expression of each of these five areas is what we must seek together.

Solidarity with Those Who Are Economically Poor

The challenge to stand in solidarity with those who are economically poor or marginalized came in diverse modes during the chapter experience. Laredo, as a city, provides a clear example of the gap between those who have wealth and resources and those who don't. Traveling by chartered buses, participants visited the *colonnias* of San Carlos. The

developers were not required by law to provide water to their homes. At San Carlos, chapter participants spent the afternoon listening to the stories of women and men who live there. Some were undocumented, economically poor and spoke only Spanish. They possessed little material wealth but were rich in hope for the possibility of a better life for their children.

Hearing the stories of the residents, their hope and their struggle was poignant, humbling and challenging. It would be easy to see this experience as the story of one specific place, but the *colonnias* of Laredo are not singular. They are multiplied in a hundred ways in cities and towns across the United States. What is happening there can happen anywhere. The *colonnias* are an echo of the world's myriad neighborhoods where poverty, oppres-

Another element of the chapter experience deepened the call to solidarity with those who are economically poor. It was a Request for Chapter Action (RCA) asking that we, as Sisters of Mercy, make explicit and public our support for immigrant peoples. For the undocumented immigrant, and "estimated 8.5 million people in the US, most of whom left their homelands solely because of economic necessity or civil, ethnic, or political persecution, the threat of deportation, xenophobia, and racism add to the harsh work and exploitation they endure."³ How can we stand in solidarity with these our brothers and sisters? The discussion surrounding the RCA stirred up passion and apprehension in the whole. While all wanted to do something, there was a question of how much risk we would embrace and to what extent our actions could jeopardize our sponsored ministries. Action and caution met. Like all members of our Institute, each participant had to name for herself the price she was willing to pay for prophetic witness; what are we willing to surrender for the sake of solidarity? Where is the greater good?

Interdependency of Earth and the Peoples of the Earth

Water, simple pure water, acted as a catalyst and symbol of the interdependency of life. Sensitized to the absence of water in the *colonias* and by the warmth of Laredo's desert environment, discussions of access to clean water took on new life. It pushed

Another element of the chapter experience . . . was a Request for Chapter Action (RCA) asking that we, as Sisters of Mercy, make explicit and public our support for immigrant peoples . . . While all wanted to do something, there was a question of how much risk we would embrace and to what extent our actions could jeopardize our sponsored ministries.

thinking beyond theory to the realities of sustainability and life itself. The dangers of privatizing water and the urgency of eliminating the sources of water contaminants moved from ecological goals to urgent human needs that cry out for relief. For me, solidarity with those who are economically poor became one with the mystery of our interrelatedness with earth, the peoples of the earth and our provident God. Action taken for sustainability took on a more urgent meaning for me than it did before chapter. It exerts a more direct and personal claim on my imagination and energies.

The whole of chapter activity moved within a global context articulated in the various Requests for Chapter Action and animated by the keynote address by Deirdre Mullin, R.S.M. In a sense, chapter was marked by a ten-day experience of contemplative listening to the anguish of our world, a world racked with the pain of violence, oppression, fractured relationships, and systemic injustice. It was a time to explore the critical issues of our

time and culture—access to clean water, Earth's own sustainability, right relationships among peoples and nations. In ritual, word, song, and action, chapter participants were challenged to see that every choice, every decision has implications that are felt far beyond the boundaries of our consciousness.

The interdependency of peoples was most clearly embodied in the stories of people. All participants were asked to prepare for this moment by engaging in the virtual immersion process "Mercy and Justice Shall Meet." The stories told by refugees, victims of ethnic violence and discrimination softened hearts and opened imaginations well in advance of our discussions. The refugee and victim of social oppression provided a concrete image of where Mercy is called to be. Deirdre's words spoke to that truth:

We, Sisters of Mercy, work in 44 countries, all of which have a multitude of diverse cultures. Many of us know at first hand diverse political and social conflicts, such as poverty, wars,

political instability and religious intolerance that are the cause of the various waves of migration that have changed and continue to change the complexion of nations. Large sectors of humanity feel displaced, uprooted, dispersed throughout the world . . . There is a vast displacement of peoples all over the planet. Europe is building walls to keep people out; thousands of people are on the move. Never in history have so many people lived in refugee camps and are quite literally homeless.⁴

At the *colonnias* of Laredo, this migration of people took on a name, a face, a voice. The biblical image of exile moved from an image to a historical fact, demanding a faith response.

Throughout the chapter our citizenship in a global community was embodied in the prayer rituals designed by the women of Mercy from the Phil-

Acknowledging our contribution to the brokenness of our world, the ritual was simple and clear. Statements taken from Mercy historical documents, letters and decisions brought participants face to face with our historical racism and prejudicial attitudes. Ultimately, we were not only being called to address the injustice of our world but to own our part in contributing to that injustice. Once more the call to conversion pressed its urgency upon each individual and upon Mercy as a whole.

Communion in Sisterhood

While solidarity with those who are economically poor and interdependency with all life were core issues for this Fourth Institute Chapter, they were the outward thrust of interior questions. Under many of the

Under many of the discussions were recurring questions: "How shall we be in Mercy? How shall we be Sister to one another? How will we sustain the bonds of union among us as we journey into this new dawn?

ippines, Caribbean, South and Central America, and Guam. The prayers gave expression to the interdependency and sacramentality of all life, gave witness to the wealth of cultural treasure we hold among us. It was a celebration of dawning, but we also experienced in prayer the darkness of our social sin, racism.

discussions were recurring questions: "How shall we be in Mercy? How shall we be Sister to one another? How will we sustain the bonds of union among us as we journey into this new dawn? Some answers were framed in administrative decisions like the sharing of our financial resources. If we are truly

one, then no one can be left without when others thrive. The manner in which our monies are shared is more than a fiscal issue.

Again the people of the *colonnias* witnessed to us what solidarity and communion means. In preparation for our coming, the people of the *colonnias* took from their meager resources, money to buy hangers for each room, hangers to make our stay more comfortable. This profound act of hospitality and generosity spoke volumes about what it means to give of your substance rather than of your excess. The challenge to rethink notions of simplicity and generosity kept growing exponentially.

The importance of our maintaining strong bonds of relationship and communion found expression in others ways as well. The concern for discovering ways to enhance voice for the membership, designing governance models that strengthen relationships and mission, care for our aging membership as well as new members provided entry points to examine who we are together. "Who are we?" was the question, not "Who am I?"

The bond of union among us was movingly expressed in the transfer of Catherine McAuley's original letters to Mercy International. Within the action were layers of meaning. Giving over of what is most cherished and dear to us, the letters of Catherine, was an act of sisterhood and trust. It proclaimed our oneness with world Mercy. Even more, the entrustment of the letters to Mercy International Centre, symbolizes the truth that Catherine is alive in

us, not just in her relics or belongings. Catherine lives because she lives in the spirit and action of each of her daughters. Lastly, the surrender of the letters marks a definitive moment of acknowledging that she is bigger than us. Catherine belongs to the whole of Mercy, to the whole of the people of God.

The care and solicitude for each other that characterized Catherine's love for her Sisters found another face in golf carts. Those planning the chapter were tender in looking to the needs of Sisters who found walking difficult and the heat wearing. Golf carts were available to carry folks from the dorms to the meeting area. This small but significant act made it possible for all participants to engage in the various activities regardless of physical limitation. Yet they, too, held a paradox. The people of the *colonias* have such limited transportation. No golf carts are available to them, only limited buses to carry them to doctors, grocery stores, and jobs. Our status as women of privilege could not have been more graphically illuminated. Owning that truth and exploring its implications creates discomfort within us. What does it mean to own our privilege? How do we carry it with open hands? What is Mercy's response to such privilege? It causes us who have committed our lives to the service of those who are economically poor to admit that we are not now nor can we ever be truly poor. We are rich in education, in opportunities, in material resources, in hope.

While acknowledging the efforts of planners to provide the opportunity for daily Mass, its absence raised up for us the need for dialogue and conversation on the centrality of Eucharist in Mercy life.

Diversity in Eucharistic Theologies

In our prayer, festivities, quiet conversations, and common strivings, we experienced communion as Sisters, an oneness in Mercy, yet, in the midst of such an intense time of union, there was a shadow that moved over the whole. Ideally, there is no time when we experience ourselves more in union with one another than when we come together in the breaking of the bread. We celebrate our oneness in Christ Jesus and are fed with the Bread of Life. The shadow that surfaced was one of genuine concern and distress about the limited availability of celebrating Eucharist together daily. It proved painful for the whole. While acknowledging the efforts of planners to provide the opportunity for daily Mass, its absence raised up for us the need for dialogue and conversation on the centrality of Eucharist in Mercy life. There exists a wide variance of Eucharistic understandings among us. For some, Eucharistic celebration raises questions of patriarchy, oppression and exclusion; for others, the reality of those issues make staying at the table of Eucharist

even more vital. The emotion and valuing underneath the distress invites all of us to enter into a depth conversation about what we treasure, what we believe, what is essential to our lives as women of faith and mercy.

The reality of "Eucharistic famine" during the chapter provides rich soil for reflection. Our Constitutions state: "By participating in the Eucharist, daily if possible, we celebrate in Word and Sacrament the Passover of Jesus and are drawn into communion with all creation."⁵ How do we experience our participation in Eucharist drawing us into "communion with all creation?" How do we live out our response to the invitation of Jesus to "Take and eat?" Dialogue about these critical questions cannot be postponed indefinitely, for they impinge upon our deepest identity. We are invited to do what Sister Mary Daniel challenged us to do: "put on the spirit of hospitality that welcomes probing, questions, doubts and, yes, even tensions and moments of chaos as raw materials for the Spirit's creative action, to pursue integrity, that fecund energy which wondrously begets wholesome relationships and interactions

... welcome the Presence of God who invites you to a profound engagement with matters that matter . . ."⁶

The experience of "Eucharistic famine" occasions for us not only the invitation to dialogue but also to creative exploration. If we, as Sisters of Mercy, feel deeply the hunger for rich, inclusive liturgical life, so, too, do our brothers and sisters in Christ. When parish communities are deprived of daily access to Mass or the ready availability of sacramental life, there is a

Mary de Lellis Trevino. In her person, Mary deLellis witnessed to what it means to be in solidarity with those who are poor, of what it means to be simple and focused, of what it means to stay "centered in God for whom we go forward or stay back." Mary de Lellis doesn't do great deeds; she does small loving deeds that speak to the hearts of those she serves. To the people of Laredo, she symbolizes all women of Mercy, symbolizes Mercy's solidarity with them. Her words to the chapter embodied a spirit of

others hopes, dreams and frustrations; to listen to the Spirit speaking within our own hearts.

The call to contemplative listening permeated the context for Institute elections. Mary Daly, R.S.M., consistently challenged participants to let go of any personal agendas, fears, certainties that would obstruct openness to the voice of the Spirit. A stance of reverence and respect surrounded the inquiry periods with candidates for positional leadership. This climate of reverent listening allowed persons to speak from the depths of their heart.

Sister Mary Daniel Turner reminded the chapter body that contemplative listening and response is at the heart of chapter decision making.

Unfailingly contemplative you will know what it means to dwell in the Presence of God: you will experience that indeed the Spirit of God gifts you with the corporate wisdom to respond to what God is asking and gracing you to do and to be at this moment in your Institute's history . . . Steadfastly contemplative, you will learn that living in the Presence of God is simultaneously an amazing encounter with yourselves as a Body and with God Who invites and graces you to a deeper investment in the charismatic life that distinguishes the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Immersed in a contemplative spirit, you will discover that you are graced to be co-partners with the Spirit—midwives—in the bewildering process of the Institute's endless births.⁷

The clarity, courage, and empowerment that emerge through contemplative prayer move one

Throughout the whole of chapter preparation, throughout all the days of chapter, participants were challenged to listen deeply to the Spirit heard in the voices of those who are poor, oppressed, marginalized.

hunger that goes unsatisfied. What does that mean for us, ecclesial women of the church? How do we assist in multiplying the loaves and fishes? How do we use our gifts and spiritual riches to nurture the faith of the people of God? If we grow discouraged, withdraw from parish communities because they fail to provide liturgies that feed our spirit, reconcile ourselves to what is, are we standing as signs of hope for the church? How do we move in the church's dark night while maintaining our integrity and trust in the Spirit's leading?

A compelling witness to such integrity and fidelity came through a woman, small of stature but a giant in witness, Sister

sisterhood that constantly invites journeying together: "Come to Laredo. Be with us. You are welcome. You are needed. Join us."

Contemplative Listening and Prophetic Witness

Contemplative listening and prophetic action were not agenda items of the Fourth Institute Chapter. They were a context and call. Throughout the whole of chapter preparation, throughout all the days of chapter, participants were challenged to listen deeply to the Spirit heard in the voices of those who are poor, oppressed, marginalized; to listen to the Spirit speaking through each

to prophetic action. Guided by the Spirit, we can see more clearly the gap between our words and deeds. We can hear more acutely the anguish and suffering of our brothers and sisters. Indeed, we experience in a profound way our interconnectedness to peoples, to earth, to ourselves and to our God. Prophetic action doesn't come only in spectacular deeds. It is really about living, acting, and proclaiming truth. Prophetic action casts light on the dark places of our world, challenges our motivations, leads us into that liminal place between the already and the not yet.

To be prophetic in today's world asks us to speak for those without voice, to witness to interconnectedness, to seek justice and to proclaim with our lives a message of hope, to proclaim that God lives and is with us. When we reflect upon the prophetic nature of our chapter, it is not limited to our public statement on immigration or to our public witness at the *colonnias*. It is imbedded in the reality that almost three hundred women could gather in faith and act in communion with one another for the sake of our world. The call for a Mercy forum to explore how all who are called to live Mercy might more adequately meet the needs of the suffering is

prophetic in itself. It points to surrendering any illusion of self-sufficiency and embracing our need to listen to the insight and wisdom of others. It acknowledges the diverse expressions of Mercy bestowed by the Spirit upon whomever it will.

Prophetic action is found in our expressed conviction that prayer can transform. It is seen in our stance for nonviolence pointing to an alternative way of resolving the conflicts and divisions among peoples. Prophetic action was the whole of the chapter experience. We were not called to acts, but to a mode of living prophetically out of a contemplative stance.

Mercy Identity

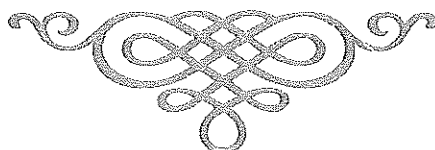
The chapter was asked to call our Institute to a renewed understanding of Mercy Identity. The Request for Chapter Action submitted asked for an Institute-wide initiative leading to a common understanding of what it means to be Sisters of Mercy, vowed ecclesial women in today's world. As I reflected upon the chapter as a whole, I realized that its themes and movements all provide entry points to that discovery. We cannot know what God calls us to be without examining our solidarity with those who are poor, our

interconnectedness with earth and its people, our relationship to each other, our contemplative center in God. It is more than any one element. The more I pray about it, the more I realize that defining Mercy Identity in terms of "Who are we?" is not the question that impels me toward conversion and renewal. The question I hold at the end of our time together and into the coming days is: "Who does God desire us to be?" That is my question. Together, out of our contemplative listening, we will hear other questions as well. What we committed to at chapter was to journey together into the answer.



Notes

- 1 Mary Daniel Turner, S.N.DdeN., Opening Reflection of Laredo Chapter, June 20, 2005.
- 2 Cynthia Serjak, R.S.M., 2005.
- 3 Request for Chapter Action: Immigration. Section II/III, 1.
- 4 Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M., "Mercy in Dialogue with a World At Risk," Keynote Address of Laredo Chapter, 4.
- 5 Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, §12.
- 6 Turner, Opening Reflection of Laredo Chapter, June 20, 2005.
- 7 Ibid.



Who Are We?

Marilyn King, R.S.M.

The hit TV show, “C.S.I.” (Crime Scene Investigation), begins with the theme song asking: “Who are you? Who? Who? Who? Who?” Such a fundamental question, when asked, can leave the person questioned speechless. I can give you my name, my address, my line of work—but but who am I really?

During our June 2005 Chapter, the same question was asked repeatedly in the song, “Who Are We in Mercy?”¹ Several Requests for Chapter Action (RCAs) asked that same question. Who are we? What does it mean to be a Sister of Mercy in the twenty-first century? RCAs focusing on the growing forms of commitment to Mercy—Companions, Associates, coworkers, Mercy Corps, volunteers—indirectly asked the question. How are these forms of Mercy life authentic expressions of our charism? How are they distinct from our vowed life? Census projections raised the starker question: “Will we even continue to exist as we move further into this century with fewer and fewer vowed members?” Such a question makes the issue irrelevant. Should we bother to ask?

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On the days during our chapter when addressing the RCAs dealing with the topic of our identity as Sisters of Mercy, the chapter body seemed almost tongue-tied, not knowing how to get a handle on the issue.

get a handle on the issue. It was clear the issue was important to us and we desired to talk with each other about our identity as Sisters of Mercy, but we were not certain about the most effective forum in which to explore this question.

A decision was made to hold a special evening meeting for those who wished to talk informally about this central concern of our life. A large number of Sisters came to this voluntary meeting. Those gathered gave personal, heartfelt and passionate testimonies about the meaning of religious life. Still, the question remained: Are we “all over the board” on this matter of identity or do we share in a common understanding of our vocation?

The Two Ends of the “Religious Sisters of Mercy”

Some years ago, one of the “wisdom Sisters” in my region observed that from her many conversations with members of the community in spiritual direction, she concluded that women entered Mercy for two different reasons: either for the life or for the works. For some, apostolic works were one aspect of living as a “Sister of Mercy.” For others, the structure of religious life was a way they could entirely dedicate themselves to the works of Mercy.

In some contemporary writings of our Sisters and friends, I have found these distinct approaches on this question of priorities between vowed life and ministry:

When I entered Mercy during the early 60s, it had nothing to do with ministry. It had everything to do with a compelling love for God that could not be satisfied in any other way. In my naiveté, I assumed all women chose religious life for that same reason. It came as surprise to me when I discovered while reading a study of religious life that some women chose religious life primarily as a way of serving others and making a difference in the world.²

One essential element [of a newly imagined . . . Mercy Institute] is that the Sisters of Mercy give

some manifestation of the spiritual life . . . We are “professionally spiritual.” . . . [W]hen 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 . . . that our life is eschatological.³

As members of an active religious congregation . . . flexibility and creativity lie at the heart of a life in which vows and common life are ordered to mission rather than mission being an overflow of vows and common life . . . Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., notes in “Of the Vowed Life and New Forms of Mercy Commitment,” that “Vows” were chapters 3, 4, and 5 in the first part of the Presentation Rule. However, Catherine moved these chapters to the end of her first part, as chapters 17, 18, and 19. Mary Sullivan concluded that this deliberate choice reveals an attitude that places “the vows and . . . intra-institutional matters in a supportive rather than in a primary position” in the lives of Sisters of Mercy.⁴

Catherine, “only reluctantly facing the possibility that the work of her little group might not endure, [entered into a life of] vowed consecration.”⁵

Which is primary—the charism of religious life or the charism of mercy?

Clues from Our Documents

We find clues to the intended purpose and identity of our lives as Sisters of Mercy in our written constitutional documents.

In the Original Rule, the First Chapter reads:

The Sisters, admitted to this religious Congregation, besides attending particularly to their own perfection, which is the principal end of all religious Orders, should also have in view, what is peculiarly characteristic of this congregation, that is, a most serious application to the Instruction of poor girls, Visitation of the Sick, and Protection of distressed women of good character.

The two “ends” of our life are clearly stated here, albeit in nineteenth-century language: the “principal” end and the “peculiar” end. In the Original Rule, the charism of religious life is primary, and the charism of Mercy is specific to the congregation.⁶

The 1923 Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the “Dioceses of San Francisco, Monterey and Los Angeles, and Tucson, Arizona” were modeled on the 1918 Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the “Associated Houses of Victoria and Tasmania in Australia.” This version, reflective of the 1918

Code of Canon Law, also speaks of two “objects” of the Institute in the first chapter:

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy has for its object the perfection of its members, by means of the observance of the simple vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience and of its own proper Constitutions, and the salvation of souls.

The characteristic works by which the members of this Institute promote the salvation of their neighbor are:

- (a) The instruction and education of the young;
- (b) The care of the sick and aged;
- (c) Assisting unfortunate girls and destitute women.

A half a century later, Vatican II called religious to renewal by rediscovering how the fundamental charism of religious life was incarnated through the unique founding charism of the congregation.

Thus, the 1992 Constitutions of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, does not speak directly of the ends or objects of our life as such. Rather, the first article speaks of Catherine’s charism to respond to God’s call to “reach out . . . to the needy of her time.” She gathered other women to serve “as religious in the mission of the church in the world.”

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Article 2 goes on to describe ourselves first as those who respond to a call to serve the needy of our time and, secondly, as those who profess four public vows, the traditional evangelical vows and the fourth vow of service.

There seems to be a reversal of emphasis in the warmer, relational language of our present Constitutions. In recent years we call ourselves to ask this question before any major decision: How will this affect the poor? We do not seem to consider the question: How will this affect our religious life?

Could it be that this double charism of our life gives a clue to our "identity crisis"? Are there two possible reasons for becoming a member of the Sisters of Mercy? Is our purpose our work? Is our purpose our vowed life? Is our purpose a life of conse-

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crated celibacy in community in which we also engage in works of mercy?

Clues from Catherine's Call

We all know the story of Catherine's vocation:

- ▶ her intense desire to serve the poor in the Dublin of her time,
- ▶ her decision to pour her inheritance into the Baggot Street house to give poor women a safe place to stay and be shown ways of making an honest living,

- ▶ her personal charism that inspired other young women to commit themselves to the works of mercy,
- ▶ her struggle about becoming a religious congregation so that her work could go on,
- ▶ her immediate return, on the morning of her religious profession, to Baggot Street to recommence her work.

Catherine was consumed with her desire to serve Christ in works of mercy.

Catherine's passion to serve those in need grew as foundations sprang up over Ireland and England and continued after her death. Today there are Mercy Sisters all over the world, carrying on her charism of Mercy.

However, vowed women are not the only ones inspired by her charism. In growing numbers there are women and men who wish to align themselves with this "passion for mercy," asking to affiliate with Catherine's daughters, without taking on the charism of religious life.

Vowed Life and New Forms of Mercy Commitment

Our Institute, along with many other religious congregations, has experienced over the past few decades the growing phenomenon of laypersons wishing to affiliate with us. They are drawn by the charism of Catherine and want to share in some way in the life of Mercy. We welcome them.

Along with their enthusiasm and commitment to Mercy, I believe our Associates, Companions, and coworkers bring another gift. That gift is to prompt us to look more deeply into what is the charism of Mercy? How is the way they seek to live it out in their lives distinct from the way vowed members do?

I have heard some say that the alternate forms of Mercy are closer to what Catherine intended, since religious life was not her intention. Is this why vowed membership is so drastically declining and "alternate forms" of Mercy life are so dramatically increasing? Is this a message of the Spirit? Did Catherine establish a religious congregation "only on the condition that the charism of service form the heart of the new congregation."⁷ After all, this is the age of the laity. It is they who are recognizing their baptismal call to live out the gospel commands

in the “marketplace” of the contemporary world. Religious vows are not necessary for this evangelization and service. If mission is primary in Mercy, what role do our vows have in the Mercy way of life? We are, after all R.S.M.s, Religious Sisters of Mercy.

Vowed Life as Our Mission

Historically, one of the main reasons religious communities were founded was to witness to a feature of the gospel that society seemed to be ignoring. For example, when the age of the martyrs was over in the first Christian centuries, the move to eremitical life in the desert began—a new way to give one’s life totally to God. In the centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire and the barbarian invasions, monasteries became the repositories of culture and learning. In the time of ecclesiastical decadence and opulence, Francis put on his rough robe and rope and espoused Lady Poverty. When the church was reeling from the Protestant Reformation, Ignatius was called to re-educate the faithful.

The hundreds of religious congregations founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a gospel response to the needs created by the fallout of the Industrial Revolution. For the most part, no social structures had been developed for education and healthcare for the growing numbers of poor people in the crowded cities and the numbers of immigrants who looked for a better life. Thousands and thousands of women banded together in religious communities to carry out the works of Mercy for these people, in the name of Christ. It was one of the few ways a woman could effectively dedicate herself to Catholic gospel-motivated service in those days.

This is not the case today, as we well know. Not only have governments established social agencies, but also today thousands of dedicated laity are giving themselves generously to the many social works we have been engaged in since our founding.

Is this situation a call for vowed religious to re-found their communities? Is it time for us to be a prophetic voice in a distinctly new way of living our vows in the post-modern society? Is our life of obedience to be a prophetic voice to the political sector of our society by modeling consensus, consultation, and resisting an adversarial culture of domination?

Is our life of poverty to be a prophetic voice to the economic machine of our world, by modeling a use of resources for the common good of people and earth? Is our life of celibacy to be a prophetic voice to a society that cannot tolerate differences or sustain relationships by our work to build communities of union and charity? Is a life of prayer a balance to the demon of busyness that is consuming

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our spirit? Is it that our vowed life itself is our fundamental mission?

To Include or to Exclude

Religious congregations responded wholeheartedly to the call of Vatican II for renewal. We entered vigorously into an evolutionary process of growth in which roots were rediscovered, dead branches were cut off, new ones were grafted on, and some dropped away. We checked the climate in which we lived and decided on better ways to adapt to it.

A recent dialogue between a contemporary evolutionary thinker, Andrew Cohen, and the “dean” of transpersonal psychology, Ken Wilber, probed the dynamics of evolutionary change as they related to the future of creation. Cohen held that as things evolve they exclude what has been before. This is the theory of exclusion. Wilbur, on the other hand, maintained that what has developed before is contained in the new.⁸ Evolution calls for transformation, transcendence. Something new is born, but there is always a death involved.

The question, "Who are we?" strongly indicates that we are in a critical stage of evolution as religious women. We are struggling with the inclusion/exclusion dynamic. At this moment of transformation, the question becomes what is to be included and what is to be excluded. The fact that we seem reluctant to talk about who we are may be an indication that we sense it will call for exclusion, just when we have gotten good at inclusion!

Conclusion

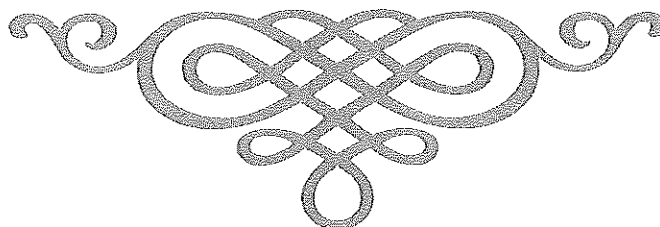
When the request for chapter action that dealt with the "identity question" was brought to the floor of the chapter, a unique dynamic seemed to come over the chapter body. On the one hand, we had much to say about the issue, and on the other hand, we floundered, not knowing what to say about the issue. During the informal evening session, differences of opinion about the "Who are we?" question were evident. Still, everyone seemed to sense that by speaking honestly with one another about this most fundamental aspect of our life an answer may well emerge.

Thus in the end, the chapter called us "to engage . . . in contemplative dialogue around our

lived experience of the *Constitutions* . . . in order to claim our vocation as apostolic women religious in the twenty-first century and come to a deeper common understanding of our identity."

Notes

- 1 See pages 49–51 in this issue.
- 2 Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., "Our First and All-Encompassing Love," *The MAST Journal* (No. 1, 2004), 14–15.
- 3 Aline Paris, R.S.M., "Sacramental Thinking: A Catholic Treasure," *The MAST Journal*, (No. 2, 2003), 8.
- 4 Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M., "Our Vow of Poverty," *The MAST Journal* (No. 1, 2004), 10–11.
- 5 Mary Kathryn Grant and Katherine Ann Hill, R.S.M., "Expand the ropes of your tent . . ." (Isa 54:2): Reflections on New Forms of Mercy Commitment," *The MAST Journal* (No. 3, 2004), 22.
- 6 Whether this phraseology in the Original Rule was intended by Catherine or was imposed by Rome complicates the question.
- 7 Mary Kathryn Grant, 23.
- 8 "Transcend and Include," *What is Enlightenment?* (November–February 2004–5), 48–55.



The Spirituality of Nonviolence

Diane Guerin, R.S.M.

Introduction

When confronted with the concept of nonviolence, we often tend to think of it as a technique or practice to be utilized in certain situations rather than as an intrinsic and fundamental part of our Christian spirituality. At a Justice Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland in 2005, Vicky Arndorfer,¹ who has been instrumental in focusing chapter attention on the need to include nonviolence as an integral part of our direction statement, asked me to consider preparing a talk on the "Spirituality of Nonviolence" for our Sisters in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The reflections I share with you in this article are taken from that presentation given in Cedar Rapids in July, 2005.

The Journey Begins

In the words of the Chinese philosopher, Lao-Tzu, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step."² The spirituality of nonviolence is one that I have aspired to for more than thirty years. I use the words "aspired to" because, just as any spirituality, the spirituality of nonviolence is a lifetime journey or pilgrimage.

Throughout our lives we make many journeys. Who among us has not anticipated a trip, a special outing, or an

extended vacation? The question arises about what to pack? Certainly the essentials; but what of the incidentals? Oh, I might need this or I might need that. What will the climate be like? What about the culture? Will it be familiar or a new experience? What should I expect? Do I know anyone who has been there? Perhaps they could help me with some of my concerns.

In my own experience of aspiring to a nonviolent lifestyle, many of these questions have arisen. They are not easily answered, but living the questions and engaging the process has been what sustained my pilgrimage. I would like to share with you just a bit of my own journey in the hope that it may resonate with some parts of your own pilgrimage.

When I was about seventeen years old, my family and I were visiting my grandmother. We were gathered in front of the black-and-white TV watching the news. The screen showed a crowd of

people, mostly black but some white, mostly young but some old, marching down a southern street, singing Negro spirituals. Suddenly, torrents of water hit them as fire hoses were turned on them. Many linked arms and fell to their knees in prayerful resistance to the power of the water. Others, many only children, were swept off their feet and tumbled over and over like leaves tossed by an autumn wind. Vicious policemen with snarling dogs confronted any who had the strength to remain standing.

I had no concept of nonviolence then—but as a teenager I did know that what I saw was wrong. Why were those I saw on the TV screen treated with such disrespect and violence? These first questions were planted in my mind and I continued to ask adults about them. Most of their answers seemed unsatisfactory. I didn't know it then, but I understand now the nightmare of that day had a profound effect on me. I had never heard of nonvio-

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lent resistance, and even if I had known the term then, I doubt it would have had any real effect on me. I just knew that what I had seen was not right.

That first glimpse of nonviolent active resistance in the face of violence was, perhaps, what motivated me to attend the March on Washington later that year. I am not sure that I could, at that time, articulate even to myself, just why I had to go. But somehow I knew that I had to do something to fight against those images of Birmingham, that there had to be some way to be a part of the changes that were trying to build a more unified society. I was to be challenged again

iously awaited. But prior to crossing the line, questions like those about what to pack for the journey had come flooding to my mind. I experienced a gnawing sense of wanting to know what to expect, how I would respond, and how it would ultimately end. Then I recognized that one can never know how things will turn out—or even be prepared for what may transpire.

What was that moment asking of me? I believe it was asking a willingness to step out in faith, to believe in the process and the power of nonviolence to change hearts and oppressive structures. Today, as I continue my journey, I try to remember this experience

what a tremendous opportunity this presented.

Then, I began to reflect on what it really meant to go to Israel. The bloody conflict between the Arabs and the Jews would no longer be headlines in the newspaper or video-clips on the evening news. I would actually be on the scene where suicide bombers were a stark reality and real people were being killed or maimed. Indeed, there was no absolute guarantee that I might not be one of them! It looked very different now. I had not been indifferent to the violence in the past, but now its face had changed. Did I have the courage to go to this land? I wasn't sure. Yet something in me was stirred.

Much of my life and ministry has been about making connections with people, exploring with them their stories, and hopefully generating thoughtful and peaceful alternatives to violence. How could I not go? I'm not sure what I expected to encounter in Israel. What I found there were people—Arabs and Jews and Christians—struggling to find ways to reconcile their differences and to live together in peace. My mental images from that trip are so vivid:

- ▶ At Schneider Children's Hospital in Tel Aviv, three women—an Arab Muslim, an Arab Christian, and a Jew—share a hospital room, each embracing her sick child unencumbered by thoughts of difference, united in a common love for their children and prayers for their recovery.
- ▶ On a kibbutz situated on the Green Line separating

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when I heard King's stirring and disquieting words in his "I Have a Dream" speech.³ Because of these experiences, I became increasingly involved in the civil rights movement, in protesting the Viet Nam war, and in exploring other avenues of nonviolent resistance and conflict resolution.

In 1999, I was one of 3,500 people who "crossed the line" at the School of the Americas. We were not arrested and processed that day, just taken by buses to a staging area a few miles away, warned about our actions, and then released to walk back to Fort Benning, where our friends anx-

and to embrace the intangibles of faith, courage, trust, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Do I always remember this lesson? No, but just the awareness is a gift, and with grace I hope someday to grow toward an ever more nonviolent way of life.

My dream of peace has taken me along a road with many twists and turns across the years. In January, 2002, I encountered yet another challenge on that journey when Carol Rittner, R.S.M.,⁴ invited me to be part of a study mission to Israel. When asked to participate, my immediate reaction was positive, thinking about

the West bank from the settlements, Palestinians and Jews work together to harvest a centuries-old olive orchard. There is no conflict between them; they are just neighbors working together to provide food for their families.

- In a classroom in Jerusalem, Arab and Israeli teachers collaborate on a new curriculum that will acknowledge the history of the past, but will also endeavor to sculpt new narratives of peace for the future.

Why do I share these few reflections with you? Perhaps because we need to acknowledge that the journey begins long before our own awareness dawns. We know that we are shaped by our life experiences—all of them. So, although the practice of nonviolence may not have been uppermost in my mind, increasingly many of my life choices have been influenced by that philosophy. Catherine McAuley never had a workshop on nonviolent resistance, yet many of her actions reflect the principles inherent to the power of nonviolence.

It is important to realize that embracing nonviolence doesn't happen all at once. One does not wake up one morning and decide henceforth to be nonviolent. It is a lifelong pilgrimage. The potential for nonviolence resides within each of us, just as the potential for violence does. Our choices make all the difference!

Present Day Realities

We are surrounded by a culture of violence that has so numbed

our sensibilities we tend not to see the extent of the evil around us. John Dear, S.J., in a talk at the *Call to Action Conference* in November, 2002, spoke about our culture's false spirituality of violence. He said:

I've come to the conclusion that in this culture of violence, with its 35 wars, its massive poverty, with 500,000 people starving to death every day, with 30,000 nuclear weapons, we have developed a very subtle, very sophisticated spirituality of violence, a spirituality of war, a spirituality of exclusivity, a spirituality of empire, which we are almost completely oblivious to, which has nothing to do with the living God.⁵

We are in need of conversion, a change of heart. That change of heart is not about political leaders, church hierarchy, multinational corporations, or those who exploit. It is first and foremost about each of us as individuals. Nonviolence asks me to reflect on my own thoughts and actions and see what about them needs to be redeemed.

- What are my thoughts when I watch or hear the news?
- What judgments do I make about world leaders and world issues?
- What actions do I take (or not take) in response to gov-

ernment policies on the national, state and local levels?

- What do I say about the neighbor who always seems to park in front of my house? The Sister who always returns the car with the gas tank empty?
- What words do I use to express my displeasure with one of my students or co-workers who has treated someone disrespectfully?
- What words or expressions are commonly found in my vocabulary, such as: "I could shoot her." "He makes me go ballistic." "She is such a . . ." "I could kill him when he does that."
- Are these reconciling or alienating words and phrases?
- What family member, sister, or neighbor do I refuse to speak with (maybe for years) because he or she hurt me long ago?
- What stereotypes, racial slurs, or put-downs do I engage in or perhaps ignore because I don't want to get involved?

How do I do violence to myself by buying into a culture that does violence to all of creation, including the earth and all its inhabitants (plants, animals, people)?

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Do I live a spirituality of exclusivity? Who is admitted to my circle? Is there room in my heart, at my table, for everybody? Are others invited to join me, or are only my "friends" invited? Do I ever think about what it feels like not to be invited?

And what of the spirituality of empire? It is so easy to identify when I look at nations, governments, systems, structures! But where have I set up my own "little kingdom?" Is it "my" workplace, "my" kitchen, "my" classroom, "my" office, "my" sphere of influence, where others had better adhere to my rules or follow my guidelines?

And what of the spirituality of empire? It is so easy to identify when I look at nations, governments, systems, structures! But where have I set up my own "little kingdom?" Is it "my" workplace, "my" kitchen, "my" classroom, "my" office, "my" sphere of influence,

We are in need of a major paradigm shift. We live in a world that is very individualistic, focused on individual wants and positions; we focus on competition rather than cooperation. A more relational worldview calls us to be in relationship with all of the world and its creatures. Our focus must shift to one of relationship and inclusivity, where all are embraced and valued. If this be true, then how can I not act? It is no longer an option but a mandate.

As Sisters of Mercy, our own direction statement asks us to view the world through the lens

of "how do my actions/choices effect those who are poor?"⁶ This, indeed, should propel us to act in solidarity with the suffering and poor of our planet. A call to nonviolence is certainly a call to be counterculture and, indeed, as religious women, that is our call and our challenge!

Spiritual transformation must begin on the individual level and expand from there. Some of you may be thinking, "*Oh, no. Not "navel gazing!" I don't want to go there. I want to be about bigger things.*" Indeed, we all do, but the process of nonviolence is just that, a process, something that is ongoing, changing,

adapting, growing, learning new things, evaluating, strategizing, and acting. We can certainly be about direct action, but we must continually focus on deepening our own commitment to a nonviolent lifestyle. We need to balance action with introspection. The redemption of the world must begin in the human heart.

Roots of Nonviolence

Jesus' call to love our enemies is frightening, demanding, challenging, and revolutionary! When asked by one of his listen-

ers, "Who is my neighbor," Jesus responds with the story of the Good Samaritan. Imagine the questioners shock when this story was told. The Samaritan was an outcast, a cultural enemy, one looked down upon. How would Jesus answer that question today? Would the story be about the homeless man, the abused woman, the Arab grocery store owner, the Hispanic prisoner, the Islamic Imam, the Sister suffering with mental illness, the neighbor who just doesn't fit into the community? How would I feel had I been the one asking the question? Might my response have been, "Now, why did he have to go and say that? It's just too much to ask!" Is Jesus asking for a nonviolent response to those we see as "different" from ourselves, whatever form that difference may take?

While nonviolence is a term more readily associated with the twentieth century, its essence describes a path of spiritual discipline at the very root of the Christian faith. Dee Dee Risher, in the magazine *The Other Side*, points out an important consideration when examining nonviolence:

Our century closely associates nonviolence with political activism for social change . . . Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, were two remarkable leaders, who galvanized nonviolent movements of liberation for their people. Often those movements are viewed independently of the authentic, deeply personal faith disciplines Gandhi and King followed.⁷

What spiritual disciplines are asked of us who seek a nonviolent spirituality?

We need to cultivate a willingness to stay in the place of struggle, foster a belief that those who differ from our point of view are not the "enemy," but rather persons we need to engage to increase our understanding. Nonviolence requires us to open ourselves to love—of God, of self, of others. If we are able to sense the presence of "the other" in all whom we encounter, then the ways we speak, communicate, live, act for change, build community, respond to threat—will all be fundamentally changed. This is the beginning of transformation,

The journey toward nonviolence has as much to do with our inner spiritual lives as the social structures around us. This ethic of love, to which we aspire, is evident in our daily lives, in our families, religious communities, churches, ministries, workplaces. It is visible in our decision making, our collaboration, and our respect for one another.

Gandhi and King: The Connections

Mohandus Gandhi (1869–1948), born in Porbander, India, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968), born in Atlanta, Georgia, although removed in time and space from each other, shared many of the same passions. Each possessed a keen intellect and devoured theological and mystical writings, pondering their implications both from a personal perspective and from a view to broader social justice application.

Gandhi read the Koran, the New Testament, and Indian

religious books, of which the Bhagavad Gita was to have the greatest influence on his life. His choice of law as a profession is what ultimately led him to seek answers about the social injustices of his day.

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Martin Luther King, Jr. was well versed in the New Testament; however, he was also influenced by the works of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Locke, and Karl Marx, among others. His reflections always left him pondering how one moves from a personal relationship with God, or a Higher Power, to an active role in changing the social and economic conditions that oppress people. In *Stride Toward Freedom*, King states:

It has been my conviction . . . that any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried. It well has been said: "A religion that ends with the individual, ends."⁸

Dr. King made this statement while a seminary student at Crozer Theological Seminary in

Chester, PA. He was experiencing a difficult time with his own personal belief in the power of love to change hearts and ultimately social structures. One Sunday afternoon, he and some fellow students traveled to Phila-

delphia to attend a meeting sponsored by Fellowship House, a human relations training center. The speaker was Dr. Mordacai Johnson, President of Howard University. Dr. Johnson had just returned from India and spoke of his visit to one of Gandhi's ashrams where he immersed himself deeply in the Mahatma's life and teachings. King listened that afternoon and found himself drawn into the story. He found Johnson's words and Gandhi's message electrifying. It wasn't the first time King had heard of Mahatma Gandhi, but that afternoon he determined to purchase as many books as he could find about Gandhi and to seriously study his philosophy.⁹

What King heard that day was to have a profound impact on his life, and later his ministry of social justice. King's struggle with reconciling one's individual love

King tells us that many of the things he had been unable to clear up intellectually were now solved in the sphere of practical action. What initially seemed disconnected was now becoming more integrated and whole.

of God and the social consciousness and responsibility demanded by that love found its expression in Gandhi's method for social reform. Indeed, is this not similar to the paradigm shift I mentioned earlier—moving from the individualistic worldview to a relational worldview?

King was so taken by Gandhi's philosophy that he was moved to reflect in *Stride Toward Freedom*:

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months.¹⁰

King continued his studies at Boston University and was continually challenged and energized by new ideas and philosophies. In 1954, he ended his formal studies and he and his wife Coretta moved to Montgomery, Alabama where Dr. King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. A year later, with the initiation of the Montgomery bus boycott, King found himself thrust into a

position of leadership with an opportunity to utilize Gandhi's principles of nonviolence in a uniquely American setting. This would become a seminal event in what evolved into the civil rights movement in the United States.

Reflecting on this period in *Stride Toward Freedom*, Dr. King articulates his journey thus:

When I went to Montgomery as a pastor, I had not the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable. I neither started the protest nor suggested it. I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman. When the protest began, my mind, consciously or unconsciously, was driven back to the Sermon on the Mount, with its sublime teachings on love, and the Gandhian method of nonviolent resistance. As the days unfolded, I came to see the power of nonviolence more and more. Living through the actual experience of the protest, nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life. Many of the things that I had not cleared up intellectually concerning nonviolence were now solved in the sphere of practical action.¹¹

This reflection of King's signals a "turning point" for him. He tells us that many of the things he had been unable to clear up

intellectually were now solved in the sphere of practical action. What initially seemed disconnected was now becoming more integrated and whole.

Oscar Romero

There appear to be parallels between the journeys of Martin Luther King and Oscar Romero. Romero was not always a champion for the poor and marginalized. It was not until his friend Rutilio Grande was assassinated that Romero began to view his surroundings from a different perspective. He asked himself why Grande had been killed. The answer: Because he stood in solidarity with the poor and was encouraging them to speak truth to evil.

Romero knew Grande; he was his friend. How could this have happened? Now Romero began to see with new eyes. This "turning point" forever changed him. The truth had such a profound impact on Romero that he now understood, and he took up the cause of the poor and marginalized. The cost to him was the same fate dealt to his friend Rutilio—assassination.

Can we sense ourselves in the journeys of King and of Romero? What have been our turning points? Where have we suddenly been graced with integration and wholeness? The Montgomery Bus Boycott was King's first personal experience of nonviolent resistance, and it was from this that he shaped his Six Principles of Nonviolence and Six Steps for Nonviolent Social Change.

These principles and steps provide a foundation for us to

view nonviolence as a way of life, and they move us toward both action for social change, and for the personal conversion that follows the acceptance of the philosophy of nonviolence. To go into these tenets in greater detail would require more space than this article allows, but the reader may examine them in detail at the official website for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.¹²

Everyday Nonviolence

Now is time when we come to the difficult part. How do we make the philosophy and principles of nonviolence active in our own lives. Active not just on the picket line or at a demonstration, but in the choices we make everyday. This is, I believe, our greatest challenge. Shortly before he was killed, Martin Luther King wrote in a provocative aside:

I plan to stand by nonviolence because I have found it to be a philosophy of life that regulates not only my dealings in the struggle for racial justice but also my dealings with people, and with my own self.¹³

What does King mean when he refers to dealing nonviolently with self? I believe Thomas Merton provides insight into this when he quoted Quaker philosopher and religious leader Douglas Steere in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

There is a perverse form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by nonviolent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most com-

mon form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes work for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.¹⁴

from the airport that morning, he passed hundreds of thousands of people who were literally living in the streets. At that time, almost half the population of that city of several million lived in abject poverty with no shelter and little food. Each morning, carts went along the streets gathering the corpses of those who had died in the gutters overnight. Cousins was pro-

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We would do well to reflect upon Merton's words in order to become more conscious of the violence we commit against ourselves. All too often, we perceive of violence as being actions taken against others, or by others against us. All too often we fail to recognize the violence that we do to ourselves.

Conclusion

Some years ago, I heard a story that, for me provided a key to making the dream of a more just world a reality. The late author Norman Cousins once wrote of his experience as a young man traveling to India to visit one of Gandhi's ashrams shortly after the Mahatma's assassination.

Cousins' plane landed at Calcutta and he took a taxi to the central part of the city where his hotel was located. On the trip

foundly affected by the sight of this human suffering. When he got to his hotel, he locked himself in his room and sank into despair, overwhelmed by the immensity of the deprivation he had witnessed.

He remained in his room for two days, feeling powerless and impotent, knowing that there was nothing anyone could do to change the lives of these people. Then he realized that while that was true—there was nothing that any *one* person could do to address the totality of the situation, that one person could choose to address one small part—to chose his or her "vital fraction." If enough of us choose our vital fractions, change can be realized.

Cousins' metaphor is one that has inspired me and impelled me to act. Yes, the problems confronting all of us are enormous. We are citizens of a

fragmented world. Daily we witness armed conflict in Iraq; we read of lives being lost in civil wars, to preventable disease, and through famine. And daily, people's spirits are being diminished from lack of proper nutrition, inadequate health care, inaccessible education, and no hope of meaningful or sustained employment.

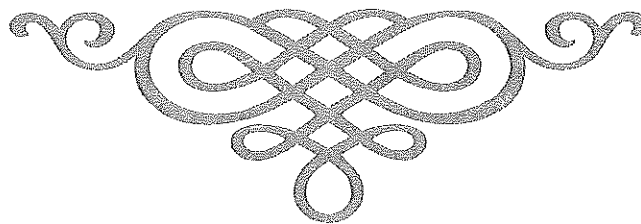
It is easy to become overwhelmed by the immensity of the problems. Indeed, some are even immobilized by them. But we cannot afford the luxury of inaction. Each of us, as citizens of the world community, must act. Each of us can, and must, choose our vital fraction and work for positive, nonviolent change. We must be conscious that we are all called to do the work of justice. This is not just the work of someone whose ministry is in direct service to those who are poor or oppressed, or the work of a specific committee

or task force. Each of us is called to a personal transformation to a more nonviolent lifestyle and to a commitment to work for justice. "If we want peace, we must work for justice."¹⁵ And who among us does not desire peace?



Notes

- 1 Vicky Arndorfer is the justice coordinator for the Sisters of Mercy of the Regional Community of Omaha.
- 2 From *The Way of Lao-tzu*, trans. by Wing-Tsit Chan and ed. by Emily Morison Beck in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations of John Bartlett: 125th Anniversary Edition*, (Boston: Little Brown Publishing, 1980), 64.
- 3 Taken from website www.martinlutherking.org (The official King site is The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 4 Carol Rittner, R.S.M., a scholar on Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Richard Stockton College in New Jersey leads groups to Israel each year.
- 5 John Dear, S.J., "Love Your Neighbor, Love Your Enemies: Jesus' All-Inclusive Nonviolence from New York to Kabul to Baghdad," p.1 in "Conference Speakers' Texts," Call to Action Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 2, 2002.
- 6 Direction Statement Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.
- 7 Dee Dee Risher, *The Other Side Online*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (Sep.-Dec., 1997).
- 8 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1958), 91.
- 9 Ibid., 96, 97.
- 10 Ibid., 97.
- 11 Ibid., 101.
- 12 See website martinlutherkingcenter.org.
- 13 Rev. Bernice A. King, "Uprooting the Seeds of Violence," *The Other Side Online*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1998).
- 14 Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).
- 15 Story attributed to Norman Cousins.



Laredo Rituals

Shaping Us as We Prayed

Sheila Browne, R.S.M.

The word “ritual” gets bad press. “It’s just another ritual,” we sometimes say, meaning it’s boring, or meaningless. However, when we look more carefully at just what a ritual is, a whole new understanding of how important rituals can be comes into our view.

Those who study rituals, their place in life and society, remind us that rituals have the power to form and shape us, expressing values and somehow bringing these values about. Year after year we join with family and friends in celebrating certain rituals: birthdays, July 4, Thanksgiving. In celebrating such days, we not only express something about their meaning, but in some way (more or less) bring the meaning about by the celebrating. Recall the Institute celebration in Buffalo in 1991. Over and over we said: “We are Sisters of Mercy!” We affirmed who we were and somehow brought it about.

In the opening event of our recent Institute chapter, we shared in expressing the goals of the chapter as written in our Constitutions. Among others, we said that we would work to preserve and promote the Mercy charism, to renew our vision, to determine our priorities and set new directions, to respond to changing needs in our mission and our life. Continuing to proclaim them all, we acknowledged the presence of Jesus among us, and honored *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, patron of the Americas. We welcomed Catherine McAuley into our midst by enthroning her icon. Then we spent the next two weeks considering how we might bring these Mercy goals about for this time and place.

As a participant in those two weeks, certain moments stand out for me as rituals that affirmed our identity and mission, thus integral to the chapter. The morning prayers prepared by Sisters from beyond the United States were impressive as events that brought forward their needs and concerns, making them the needs and concerns of us all. One such prayer concerned the devastation of land in

the Philippines caused by industrialization, resulting in the displacement of the native people who had lived there. Through slides, and a skit using traditional dress, dance, and music, we understood more fully the Sisters’ ministries there, and supported them as a “light in the darkness.”

On another morning, the prevalence of violence in society was presented in word and gesture by our Sisters from Belize and Guyana, and concluded with everyone circling the room, singing “The Circle of Mercy.” Throughout the chapter, we prayed and sang in the languages of the members of the Institute, constantly affirming by these rituals, our international reality. Many of those present commented that such moments impacted their understanding of who we are as Sisters of Mercy.

Identity, Racism, Letters, Election

The issue of our identity, raised by the many Requests for Chapter Action, caused animated conversation by all present. What a confluence of schedule, ritual, and Spirit when the morning’s song was Marian Arroyo’s “Who Are We in Mercy?” A *kairos* moment for sure! The refrain offered long-held notes as we sang, “Who are we?” and this offered moments to ponder our own answers to that question. Used

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on multiple occasions throughout the chapter, this song did what good ritual does—it both expresses an ideal and brings it about!

Other ritual moments were significant, too. On the first full chapter day, we celebrated a reconciliation ritual focusing on racism in the community. Segments of letters were read, letters from or to Superiors stating why certain young women should not be allowed to enter: they were Creole, dark-skinned or colored (sic). To hear these read brought forth from the gathered body heartfelt singing of *Kyrie eleison*. Just as at Eucharist, we began remembering our sin, and asking for forgiveness.

Catherine's letters were with us at chapter, at least for the first week. We read them, displayed under careful protective coverings, and participated in a touching ritual as Sr. Evelyn Gallagher from the Mercy International Association accepted them from Sr. Marie Chin. The ritual was simple, and very moving. Excerpts of the letters were read after which we participated in conversation about what the letters have meant to us. After intercessions for those Sisters who have translated her letters and those who preserved them, the letters were handed over to Evelyn. The manner of this transfer was memorable: they were in a chest, a treasure chest that had been nestled beneath the icon of Catherine. Marie Chin lovingly and a bit reluctantly handed them on. The ritual closed with the words Catherine used in signing all these letters. We heard in various languages: "Remember me most affectionately to all"; "May every blessing be with you"; "Give my fondest love to all . . ." We tearfully bid farewell to these treasures, singing "Clearly we are the letters of Christ, written not on tablets of stone, but written deep within us all, on tablets of the heart." Haven't we learned Catherine's heart by reading her letters!

We celebrated a reconciliation ritual focusing on racism in the community . . . To hear these read brought forth from the gathered body heartfelt singing of *Kyrie eleison*.

The rituals surrounding the election of the -Institute Leadership Team combining a silent soundscape of our world, conversation, silence, and the election itself culminated in a new song, Jeannette Goglia's "A Capable Woman We Have Found Her." The verses, "Let us surround her with the strength of our support; let us surround her with prayer in the Spirit of love," sung in Spanish and English, put into words the wishes of many hearts. In the midst of applause, embraces, and kisses, the song carried the moment in joy.

We don't often think of silence as "ritual" but it worked as that on occasions throughout the chapter. With a theme of openness and listening, we were invited to sit in silence for some time. A spirit of peace and unity pervaded the room as we considered our Mercy identity. Out of this silence rose the concluding song, one from South Africa: *O Mama Baku (Our Mothers called upon the Spirit to guide their thoughts and actions)*. Since the song lent itself to harmony, many began to sing in parts, creating a wonderful sound. You might see here a metaphor for who are in Mercy: out of silence, one sound, one pure melody to which was added beautiful harmony. Catherine McAuley is that one sound, and for almost 175 years women have joined her to continue that sound.

Trip to the *Colonnias*

Informal rituals abounded throughout our time together. The trip to the *colonnias* immersed us in the situation of people living in poverty. We went not as tourists, but as pilgrims, willing to be changed by our experience there. Lighter moments served us well too. Punch ball in the pool, and spontaneous conga lines at Rio del Mar and the Fiesta brought together Sisters who spoke different languages but understood the common language of dance and play. Laughter and good spirits marked most days as we walked or rode the campus at TAMIU.

The rituals of our Fourth Institute Chapter worked I believe, as they should. They helped us to express who we are as Mercy, reminded us of our identity in word, song, and activity, and called us to new places. "Just another ritual" could never be said about our rituals in Laredo!



Song For Reflection on Identity

Marian Thérèse Arroyo, R.S.M.

A few months prior to the convening of chapter, Martha Milner, R.S.M. (St. Louis) of the chapter ritual committee, asked me to compose a mantra for the Institute event in Laredo. This mantra was to assist those gathered in a reflection on our identity as Sisters of Mercy.

The most immediate inspiration for the reflective piece came from the two issues of the *MAST Journal: Religious Life and Constitutions*, Parts 1 and 2 (2004). The articles in these issues contain rich fare for reflection, prayer, and poetic and musical expression. Remote inspirations came from a collection of a little over twenty years of vowed life and fifty-one years of being. What was to be a simple mantra turned into a song with a number of verses.

Who Are We in Mercy

Who are we in Mercy?

Who are we in Mercy?

Living the words we vow and profess

In Jesus, bread for the world:*

Who are we

In God's communion enfleshed?

Who are we in Mercy?

Who are we in Mercy?

Transformed by the gospels and mission

Contemplative prayer, apostolic action:

Who are we

In God's compassionate love proclaimed?

Who are we in Mercy?

Who are we in Mercy?

Discerning every human need

Dignity, rights, responsibilities:

Who are we

In God's justice revealed?

Who are we in Mercy?

Who are we in Mercy?

Daughters of Catherine in sisterhood

Led by the spirit renewing the face of the
earth:*

Who are we

In God's vision to be fulfilled?

Who are we in Mercy?

Who are we in Mercy?

While the text may point to various aspects of our identity, what we do and the constitutions by which we live, each question is intended to probe our reflection further. The song itself does not answer the questions we ask of ourselves. The questions, however, may transport us to explore those elements of our lives that address, for example, integrity of word and action, faith amidst brokenness and uncertainty, justice in a proud and material world, and hope in God's vision and promise.

The Fourth Institute Chapter has invited all members of the Sisters of Mercy to engage in a reflective process on our Constitutions, articles 1–29. I imagine that this process will come in a variety of forms. A song such as “Who Are We in Mercy” would be only one of many expressions that will assist us in our contemplative soul work.

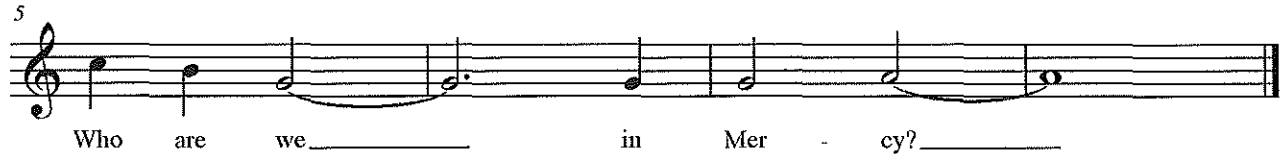
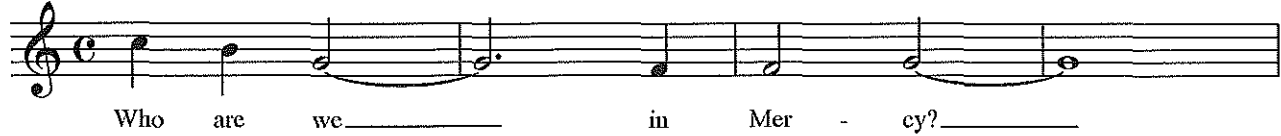
**Phrases have been modified since chapter.*

For the Fourth Institute Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Laredo, Texas June 20-30, 2005

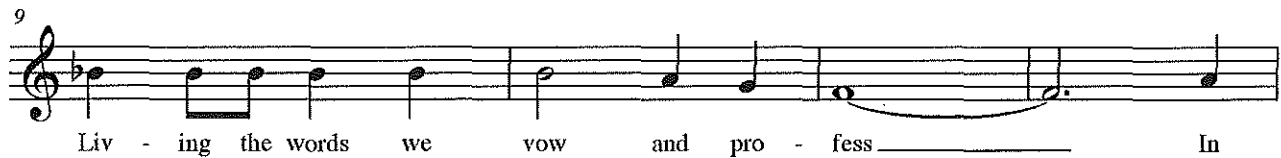
Who Are We in Mercy

Marian Thérèse Arroyo, RSM

$\text{♩} = 100$
Refrain

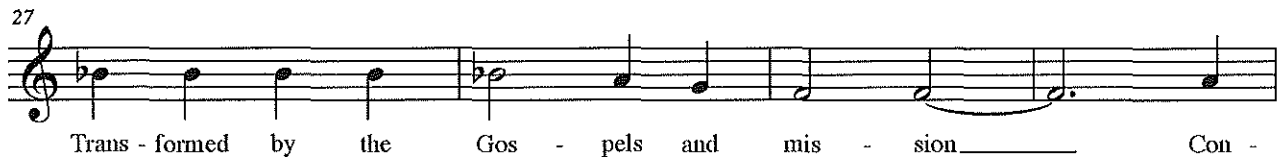


Verse One



Refrain

Verse Two



Refrain

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For accompaniment notation (piano/guitar), CD, and other requests
please email: arroyom54@yahoo.com

Who Are We in Mercy

Refrain

46

Who are we _____ in Mer - cy? _____ Who are we _____ in Mer - cy? ____

Verse Three

53

Dis - cern-ing e - very - hu - man need; _____ Dig - ni - ty, rights, res -

60

pon - si - bi - li - ties: _____ Who _____ are _____

67

we _____ in God's jus - tice re - vealed?

Refrain

Verse Four

73

Daugh-ters of Ca - therine _____ in sis - ter - hood. _____ Led by the

79

Spi - rit re - new-ing the face of the earth: _____ Who _____

86

are _____ we _____ in God vi - sion to be ful - filled.

Refrain

Controversy, Conversation, and Conversion

M. Gratia L'Esperance, R.S.M.

What does it mean when religious or civil authorities declare a controversial topic completely settled and not open to further discussion or development? If such statements come from a conviction that dissent is disloyal, many of us find it difficult to accept this point of view, given the constitutional tradition of free speech in the United States and elsewhere. The question also touches on freedom of informed conscience. The following reflections arise from a Roman Catholic Christian experience, but are meant to be widely inclusive.

As one example, the pope, many Roman Catholic bishops, and leaders of other faith traditions have either urged severe restrictions on the use of the death penalty, or condemned it altogether. Yet there are many who disagree. On matters such as racially-based inequality or the endorsement of adult sex with minors, large majorities have reached a consensus, making these questions less open for discussion in public forums. Many persons and organizations would refuse to provide time or space for such views to be aired.

In considering the notion of dissent, what does it mean to be members of a group adhering to a creed, doctrines, or sacred texts, especially if the

concept of infallibility is involved? Is the issuance of a particular statement to have primary importance, or is the consideration that human beings are essentially relational even more basic?

In examining divisive situations, it can be productive to reflect on the gift of language understood as a context for experience, the tool of human relationships, as silence and dialogue, as prophecy and proclamation, and as the link for communication, communion, and community.

Language Itself

Who among us has not struggled with language—to find the right word to express our thought or feeling, to understand what someone else is trying to say, to grasp a new word, to explore our own language or one new to us. Without doubt, using language is the most common of human activities, yet it is also the most complex. We study it as infants and toddlers long before we are aware of learning anything, absorbing endless patterns of sound and syntax before we ever enter a classroom. In all our daily human interactions, we re-create and modify our language and contribute to its constant change of vocabulary and usage.

Each language presents a unique point of view in looking at reality, and differs in its focus on what is considered significant in that culture. For example, almost all the verbs in European languages embody the importance of time by automatically indicating past, present, or future tense. In contrast, Semitic and some Native American verb forms concentrate on totally different perspectives, such as repetitive action or an enduring condition. Speakers may easily refer to time if they wish to make a point of it. At least one Native American language uses no noun forms at all, understanding everything as being in motion! All is set forth in dynamic, changing, and active terms.

What does it mean when
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development? this point of view.

A word carries not only a primary meaning—a denotation—but also numerous connotations: emotional overtones and cultural resonances. “Collaborate,” for instance, carries not only the positive idea of “working together,” but has acquired a negative implication in the context of Nazi history. Translation of the unique expressions of one language into another is always inadequate and sometimes impossible. An Italian phrase sums it up: “*traduttore, traditore*”—translator, traitor.

Words provide the necessary symbols that we use as tools to process our experience of reality and to relate to one another. This is vividly portrayed in the life of Helen Keller, when Annie Sullivan succeeded in helping the deaf-blind child connect the expression “water” with the wetness she was encountering. This also illustrates how the gift of speech is once removed from experience, filtered through our individual ability to symbolize that experience.

The spoken symbol remains the fundamental form of what we know as language. Spoken words vibrate through the universe: “My word . . . that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11). Through the power of the word, worlds are created, including our own personal and family universes. Written texts often suggest added authority and weight, and can be more imposing, polished, and durable than the fleeting spoken word. Yet writing carries its own limitations: it is a symbol of a spoken symbol, twice removed from our experience of reality. The clarity of a text is further weakened when it does not document details of body language, intonation, pace, or volume.

And so each of us may experience the same event in different ways, express it in different words, and struggle to write it down through the varying filters of memory. Is it any wonder that there are several versions of the same story recorded in our sacred scriptures? The real wonder is that God is depicted as bending down to hear our words (Ps 116:1) and making use of our limited vocabulary to reach out to us. While our scriptures are vitally important to our faith as they inspire, challenge, and mentor our interactions, they still retain their secondary symbolic status in service to the living relationships created by God. If we believe that the infinite God can be fully expressed by limited human symbols, then we create idols for ourselves.

God's Word: Prophecy and Proclamation

“In the beginning was the Word,” John’s Gospel begins, echoing the first verses of Genesis, portraying the eternal dialogue of a God who is relational, in whose image humans are created as relational. Through our own ongoing dialogue, we have the potential to build loving, respectful relationships that ultimately bear fruit in mutual silence and contemplation. Here, few words are needed in a communion of flesh, spirit, and God’s Spirit. Out of that pregnant silence rises the possibility of creating new life and even of prophecy: a proclamation that describes experiences and relationships in order to reveal more to us about God and about being human.

In its variety of mysterious dimensions, the human word can be viewed as a sacrament of the presence and power of God and of God’s Word. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the “People of the Book,” believe that God uses human words to communicate with us and form a relationship with us. For Christian believers, God has gone even beyond that by using our human condition to embody the eternal Word in Jesus. We receive not only a written text, but one who is human like us, the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), with whom we can relate, whose words reveal who God is for us, and whose example provides a model for human living.

The proclaiming of the Christian Gospel began on Easter morning, according to John 20:18, with the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, “Go to my brothers and tell them . . .” Then the disciples, once emboldened by the Spirit, continued to declare the news in spite of opposition. After heated debate in the community about accepting people from outside the Jewish tradition, Paul spread the word around the Mediterranean. The Gospel texts and the various Epistles were gradually developed and accredited as an authentic witness to the experience and preaching of the early disciples. To this day, the Good News continues to be announced first and

If we believe that the infinite God
can be fully expressed by limited
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foremost by the example and word of those who gather together to live out a relationship with Jesus.

Just as our daily relationships with family and friends formed our basic language skills, so in the same way most of us initially absorbed our faith. We continue to build on that foundation if we try to hear God's Word and human words in a receptive silence: the *ob-audire* that is the Latin root of our term "obedience." The word freely spoken, freely heard in silence, pondered, and then answered, forms the hub of communication and the linkage of relationships. It is primarily in the living reality of our relationships that the living God provides opportunity for encounter with us—not by our simply saying, "Lord, Lord," but by our response to one another's presence and needs. Jesus identified these needs as his own. "When you did it for one of the least of these, you did it for me." (Matt 25:40).

**As with any gift, we do not
always use silence or speech in a
positive way. When we compel
silence by force, when we refuse
to speak or listen to another,
such imposed silence is a
weapon of violence.**

Such concern for those in need is a major theme of the texts sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The holy Qu'ran speaks to this:

"Give to the near of kin their due, and also to the destitute and to the wayfarer. Do not squander your substance wastefully . . . But if, while waiting for your Lord's bounty, you lack the means to assist them, then at least speak to them kindly" (The Night Journey, 27).

The prophet Amos warned the rulers of Judah and Israel, with resonance in our own day:

"Woe to the complacent in Zion, to the overconfident on the mount of Samaria . . . You would put off the evil day, yet you hasten the reign of violence! . . .

"Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably upon their couches, they eat . . . and drink wine

from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph! (6:1, 3–6).

"Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, and destroy the poor of the land! The Lord has sworn, 'Never will I forget a thing they have done!'" (8:4, 7).

Although we often respond generously to sudden disasters, we are apt to ignore those that develop over a long term, blinded like the rich man who never noticed Lazarus begging at his gate (Luke 16:19–31). Sadly, we are all too accepting of a status quo where the divide yawns ever wider between desperate poverty and prodigal affluence, all too apathetic in the face of famines and epidemics, of homicide in our streets and genocide in our world.

Silencing and Dialogue

As with any gift, we do not always use silence or speech in a positive way. When we compel silence by force, when we refuse to speak or listen to another, such imposed silence is a weapon of violence, a wound that chokes off the breath of life, a stroke that blocks the circulation and paralyzes the nerves in the human community. As an alternate way to express fear and anger, we may begin shouting at one another without listening at all. Paradoxically, as the volume grows louder, hearing becomes impossible.

This kind of fiery shouting or freezing silence creates a dark night of the soul for individuals and communities, a blindness and deafness where it becomes difficult to discover anything of what God is communicating to us. This is especially true when people are utterly convinced that their word is the only word to be spoken, their understanding the only truth, their experience or tradition the only authentic perception of reality, their pattern of relationship the only path.

What agonies have we caused by imposing our views, imprisoning one another through silence, or shouting our slogans! People wave their flags, endorse restrictive public policies, build forts and missiles, invade one another's homes and nations, and kill each other as aliens and unbelievers, all in the name of being right.

It is only by accepting our human limitations, by embracing Anselm of Canterbury's classic insight of "faith that seeks understanding," by trying to inte-

A healthier relativism takes account of the distance between the limited expressions of human understanding and the fullness of reality which only the divine understanding can encompass.

grate our actions with our words and beliefs, and by reverence for one's own tradition and that of others, that we build an authentic self and authentic communities. It is only through humble confidence, rooted in acceptance of our limitations and clarity about our values, that we can effectively reach out in dialogue with others who hold different positions.

This is not to say that anything goes, or that we should never critique a particular viewpoint. That shallow sort of relativism fails to take peoples' concepts and beliefs seriously. A healthier relativism takes account of the distance between the limited expressions of human understanding and the fullness of reality which only the divine understanding can encompass.

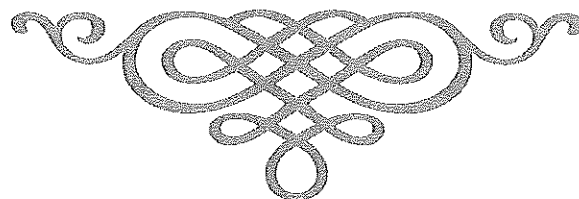
Transformation and Community

Today we are challenged by constant good news and bad news from around the world. Instant

transfers of information and money, the symbols and tools of power, now overflow the borders of nations, the scope of present law, and the control of governing authorities. As Teilhard de Chardin envisioned, we are witnessing the creation of a global consciousness, where new circulatory systems and new nervous systems have begun to link the parts of humanity into one body, with unimagined potential for good and evil. What will help us to analyze this enormous expansion? What principles will we use to guide this process of globalization?

Is it any wonder, then, that we find tension and dissent as part of the discussion in our civic and faith communities? Or that questions arise that are most painful and complex? That prophets may remain without honor in their own community? That authority at all levels is exercised with immense difficulty, burdening our leaders as they struggle to create and maintain the intricate structures that support our communities?

As individuals, as civic communities, and as faith communities, how will we use our gifts of silence, speech, and prophetic proclamation to rebuild our fragile networks of community, communication, and communion? Efforts have already begun to bring together people of various cultural and faith traditions. The conversations must and will continue. It is no accident that the words conversation and conversion come from the same root meaning "to turn toward." All of us are being called to participate, as the Shaker hymn invites us, in "turning, turning till we come down right."



Book Review

Love Is All Around In Disguise: Meditations for Spiritual Seekers by Irene Dugan, r.c. and Avis Clendenen (New York: Chiron Publications, 2004)

Reviewed by Joyce Kemp, r.c.

Love Is All Around in Disguise* invites the reader to enter into spiritual exercises that evoke from the depths of the psyche the Christ-life seeded in every person. This is not a book simply to be read. It is a series of practices that lead to a more holistic life in Christ. Dugan states in the introduction, "The exercises of holistic depth psychology and of spirituality—the wedding of the art forms of spirituality and life experience—help us discern the workings of destructive and creative forces within us." She believed that both St. Ignatius, originator of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and Ira Progoff, creator of the Intensive Journal® writing method, invented practices that exercised the muscles of the inner world. She was Jungian in her approach to spiritual development. Just as the acorn becomes an oak tree, so the human being is seeded with the potential to develop into a distinct, unique and fully alive person. This process is not just in the head or the heart. It is in every part of oneself and every aspect of one's life.

The genesis of this book began in the late 1960s, when the Cenacle Sisters discovered that their first Sisters had led women in the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* themselves. That began a decade of studies in the *Exercises* and training in leading thirty-day retreats. In 1966, Dr. Ira Progoff, a holistic depth psychologist, created the Intensive Journal® as a contemporary approach to spiritual renewal. Dugan made his workshop and brought him to Chicago in the early 1970s. Her dream was to combine the journal and the *Exercises* into a single workshop, which she and Bill Hewitt, S.J., lead in 1980. Dugan's followers encouraged her to write a book based upon her work. She was invited to Loyola University, Chicago, as a writer in residence, but soon became involved in working with the faculty and students of the Institute of Pastoral Studies there. Confined to a wheelchair during the final years of her life, Dugan, with the help of a voice-activated computer, began to write in earnest. Dugan willed her manuscript and an audiotape to Dr. Avis Clendenen just before her death on July 21,

1997. Clendenen spent seven years rewriting the text into a publishable format. She has captured Dugan's dream with amazing fidelity.

Beginning with the Principle and Foundation of St. Ignatius and moving toward his Contemplation to Attain Divine Love, the very practical exercises of this book are framed by an invitation to see God's love in all of creation and to both receive and respond freely to that love. This includes a call not only to one's own transformation, but also to bringing about the transformation of the world. For those willing to do the deep inner work necessary to becoming whole in Christ and serving others, this book is a treasure.

**Love Is All Around in Disguise: Meditations for Spiritual Seekers (with enhanced CD) and Spirituality in Depth: Essays in Honor of Sister Irene Dugan, r.c. (Edited by Avis Clendenen) are available for a reduced rate of \$17 each plus \$3 shipping and handling. Make checks payable to Saint Xavier University/Dugan Legacy Project, c/o Dr. Avis Clendenen, 3700 West 103rd Street, Chicago, IL, 60655.*



Above: Recipients of M.A.S.T. Research Recognition Awards.
 Left: Mary Sullivan, R.S.M. (Rochester), right: Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (Auburn).

Below: Participants at the 19th Annual M.A.S.T. Meeting, June 10-12, 2005, Burlingame, California
 Front L-R: Mary Sullivan (Rochester), Katherine Doyle (Auburn), Marie Noël Keller (Dallas)
 Back L-R: Mary-Paula Cancienne (Merion), Marilee Howard (Auburn), Eloise Rosenblatt (Burlingame),
 Mary Ann Scofield (Burlingame), Beth Flannery (Merion), Ellen Murray (Merion),
 Mary Celeste Rouleau (Burlingame), Aline Paris (Vermont), Marie Michele Donnelly (Merion)





Contributors

Marian Thérèse Arroyo, R.S.M., (North Carolina-Guam) is a member of the Sisters of Mercy Guam Region Leadership Team and serves as the executive director of pastoral ministries in the Archdiocese of Agaña. She oversees the Offices of Faith Formation, Family and Youth Ministry, Worship, Pastoral Planning, Communications and Campus Ministry. She also ministers to an elderly parent. Marian received her master's degree in liturgical music from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. She composed the *Misan Santa Marian Kamalen*, the first Chamorro Mass native to Guam; "Te Deum"; "I Am Yours for Time and Eternity"; "God of Love and Tender Mercy." Her honors include *Maga'lahi (Governor's) Arts Award in Humanities* (1999) and *Manfåyi: Who's Who in Chamorro History, Volume III, Hale'-ta Series* (2002). She has previously published articles in *The MAST Journal* in 2000 and 2002.

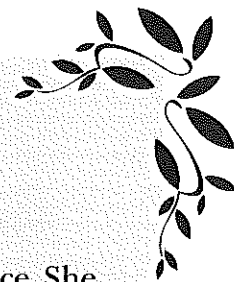
Sheila C. Browne, R.S.M., (Brooklyn) is coordinator of the Office of Worship for the Diocese of Rockville Centre. She received an M.A. in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame, and an M.S. in music education from Queens College of the City University of New York. Her publications have appeared in *Church Magazine*, *Pastoral Music Magazine* and the Homily Service of the Liturgical Conference.

Katherine Doyle R.S.M., (Auburn) is currently ministering in Mercy Spiritual Ministries Outreach. She received her M.Ed. from the University of San Francisco and an M.A. in liturgical studies from St. John's University, Collegeville, MN. She has served in congregational leadership for her region. A frequent contributor to *The MAST Journal*, Katherine was a member of the editorial committee developing *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas* and has recently published *Like a Tree by Running Water, the Story of Mary Baptist Russell*.

Gratia L'Esperance, R.S.M., (Rochester) holds an M.A. in French from Middlebury College, VT and an M. Div. from St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester, N.Y. She did graduate work in linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She has served in educational ministries at elementary, secondary, and college levels, including adult education for the Diocese of Rochester, and field education at St. Bernard's Seminary. She was assistant director for Mercy Center with the Aging from 1983 to 2000, and was editor from 1985 to 2005 of a regularly up-dated 200-page *Resource Guide for Planning the Care of Aging Loved Ones*. Presently she serves as an information and referral specialist at the center, as well as administrative roles in civic organizations, the Interfaith Alliance of Rochester and the local Mental Health Association.

Diane Guerin, R.S.M., (Merion) has a Ph.D. in education from Walden University in Minnesota with a concentration in alternative dispute resolution. She is currently an adjunct professor at Gwynedd Mercy College Center for Lifelong Learning, an accelerated degree program for adults. She has been involved in the field of nonviolence education for more than thirty years and is the former program director for the Philadelphia Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence in Philadelphia, the only satellite center of the King Center in Atlanta, Georgia. She was a desegregation coordinator for the School District of Philadelphia and currently ministers as director of Creative Conflict Consultants providing training, mediation, and conflict resolution services to a variety of groups and individuals.





Contributors (continued)

Sister Joyce Kemp, r.c., Ph.D., is a Sister of the Cenacle of the North American Province. She is on the ministry staff of the Cenacle Retreat House and Spirituality Center in Warrenville, Illinois, where she offers spiritual direction, gives retreats, and leads Progoff Intensive Journal workshops. Sister Kemp was trained by both Sister Irene Dugan, r.c. and Ira Progoff. She is the author of *The Spiritual Path of Caryll Houselander* (Paulist Press 2001).

Marie Noel Keller, R.S.M., (Dallas) earned a Th.D. in New Testament and early Christian origins from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. She is executive director of the Institute on Sacred Scripture at College Misericordia in Dallas, PA, a staff member of Core Ministries itinerant Spiritual Life Center, and director of the Dallas Region Mercy Association. Her publications have appeared in *Bible Today*, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, and *The MAST Journal*.

Marilyn King, R.S.M., (Burlingame) is currently director of Lifelong Formation and Education at St. Joseph Proto-Cathedral in Bardstown, Kentucky where her principal ministry is with adult faith formation. She lives at The Laura, a place designed to balance ministry and prayer, community and solitude, and simple living among rural people. She received her doctorate from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in the field of philosophical theology and spirituality. Her dissertation was on purity of heart as the central focus of Thomas Merton's spiritual theology.

Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M., is from Derry, Ireland. She is presently the director of Mercy Global Concern, representing the worldwide Sisters of Mercy at the United Nations. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Ulster and did her work on the feminization of poverty. Recently she ran a successful international workshop entitled "Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practice," attended by fourteen Sisters of Mercy from around the globe. This will be repeated in September 2006.

Mary Aquin O'Neill, R.S.M., (Baltimore) is a specialist in the areas of theological anthropology and feminist theology. She received her Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University and devoted twenty years to higher education. She has taught at Mount Saint Agnes College, Vanderbilt, Loyola College of Maryland, Salve Regina College, and the University of Notre Dame. She cofounded Mount St. Agnes, a theological center for women in 1992.





Discussion Questions

(**Arroyo**) Discerning every human need
Dignity, rights, responsibilities:
Who are we
in God's justice revealed?

Taking this stanza of "Who Are We in Mercy" what working definition would you give for "God's justice"? Is it different from the ideals of justice espoused by such organizations as the United Nations, or welfare projects sponsored by the federal and state government?

(**Browne**). "On the first full chapter day, we celebrated a reconciliation ritual focusing on racism in the community. Segments of letters were read, letters from or to Superiors stating why certain young women should not be allowed to enter: they were Creole, dark-skinned or colored."

What emotions and reactions would you expect will rise to the surface when the theme of "our racism" is discussed outside a time of ritual?

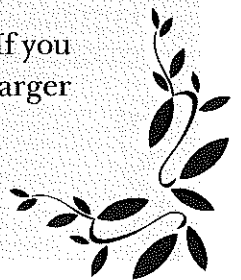
(**Doyle**) "There are also areas that remain cloudy, leaving the heart with a sense of disquiet: the inability of the chapter body to clearly name and explore its concerns relating to our incorporation process; the underlying tension relating to the locus of authority in multiple areas of Institute life; the recurring concern that our movement to reconfigured communities might reduce members' voice and ability to influence our shared future."

Which of these "cloudy" areas do you have thoughts about, and to what persons and groups will you communicate your clarity?

(**Guerin**) "What words do I use to express my displeasure with one of my students or co-workers who has treated someone disrespectfully? What words or expressions are commonly found in my vocabulary, such as: 'I could shoot her.' 'He makes me go ballistic.' . . . Are these reconciling or alienating words and phrases? What family member, sister, or neighbor do I refuse to speak with (maybe for years) because he or she hurt me long ago? . . . Where have I set up my own 'little kingdom'? Is it 'my' workplace, 'my' kitchen, 'my' classroom, 'my' office, 'my' sphere of influence, where others had better adhere to my rules or follow my guidelines?"

(**Keller**) "The more one studies the Bible the more one realizes that the men and women we meet within its pages are universal people from whom we can all learn. Corinthians, Philippians, Mary of Magdala, Paul, the Pharisees, to name but a few, we are all of them. Hence, we will never exhaust what we can learn from stepping into their stories and dialoguing with them; for what was true for them, is true for us."

Which of the groups or individuals in the Bible do you most closely identify with? If you had to personify the differences before and after your own region joined with a larger community, what biblical group or person would express your perception?





Discussion Questions (continued)

(King) "The question, 'Who are we?' strongly indicates that we are in a critical stage of evolution as religious women. We are struggling with the inclusion/exclusion dynamic. At this moment of transformation, the question becomes what is to be included and what is to be excluded. The fact that we seem reluctant to talk about who we are may be an indication that we sense it will call for exclusion, just when we have gotten good at inclusion!"

What should be included and excluded, in your view, in the living of vowed religious life?

(L'Esperance) "It is only through humble confidence, rooted in acceptance of our limitations and clarity about our values, that we can effectively reach out in dialogue with others who hold different positions. This is not to say that anything goes, or that we should never critique a particular viewpoint. That shallow sort of relativism fails to take peoples' concepts and beliefs seriously."

How much diversity of viewpoint on the fundamentals of religious life is comfortable for you? Has religious life lost its values, stayed the same at root, or evolved in a good way?

(Mullan) "Mary is a sister to marginalized *people* who live unchronicled lives in oppressive situations. It does her no honor to disconnect her from her conflicted and dangerous historical circumstances, and transmute her into an icon of peaceful, middle-class life robed in royal blue."

Has your personal image of Mary changed since you entered the Sisters of Mercy or became an Associate? Why?

(O'Neill) "It is essential to the life and health of the Church that laywomen and laymen, including women and men in religious life, bring our experience of politics, education, health care, family life, community life and a myriad of other experiences to the debates and discussions about 'problems of special urgency' and do so fully aware of what the church declared in *Gaudium et Spes*."

What are the practical means Sisters of Mercy have for communicating to male leadership in the church our own experience "of politics, education, health care, family life, and community life? What is the measure for determining that the communication is being heard?



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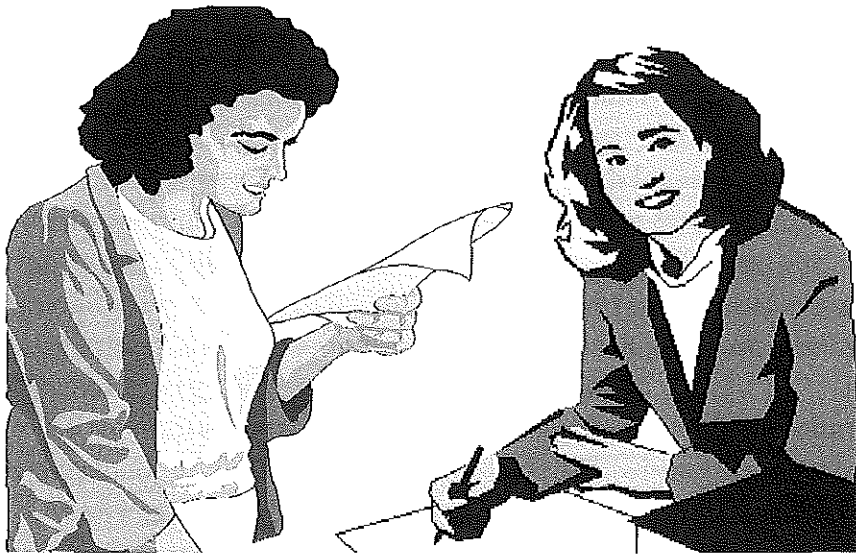
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MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

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.

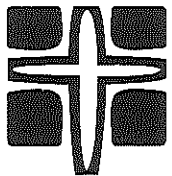
MAST has been meeting annually since then, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M. currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST will hold its annual meeting in Philadelphia, June 11–13, 2006.

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

Membership dues are \$20 per year, payable to Marilee Howard, R.S.M., MAST treasurer, 8380 Colesville Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Email: mhoward@sistersofmercy.org.

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



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