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Interpreting Scripture in the Contemporary Church

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Dear Readers,

Our world is at war. It is difficult to focus on our work, our family and community life, our worship without a paralyzing sense of sorrow, shame and anxiety overcoming us. We realize that as a human civilization we are no further than using violence to manage our conflicts.

I'm not sure how to work, how to play or pray these days. I listen to the news, watching the F-15 fighter cameras target their sites and seeing POW's sitting behind barbed wire, barely able to lift their heads for the cameras. I study the charts and maps of the Persian Gulf area in the newspapers. I read the latest editorials. And, then on the late news I see my neighbors and friends shouting "USA, USA" on one side of the road and "No blood for oil" on the other side. How shall I think or pray? How do I understand the meaning of human life in the midst of this?

There is a clue in this issue of The MAST Journal, edited by Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt, in reviewing the various methods of Scriptural interpretation, the varieties of "pipe" through which we hear our God in the Scriptures, asks us how we know the validity of one interpretation over another. Funny that the God who is revealed in our Scripture is the same God revealed to the people we fight alongside and against in the Middle East. We are faced with the question: which appeal to this God, which voice of this God, is really of this God?

Surely we need, as Judith Shubert, suggests, a prophet. One who, although rejected, brings justice and mercy. Let us storm heaven for such a one! Or, let us provide resources and listen carefully, as Sharon Kerrigan and Marilyn King do, as they validate God's word in our midst. It is a word that is found among the apparently voiceless.

Let us pray for a prophet to whom we might listen, one who will help us wait for "a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more war and no more tears" with undivided hearts. The vision is given to those who wait, to those who listen. Let us pray to hear our God who is surely speaking.

Let us pray together.

Sincerely,

Maryanne Stevens, RSM

The MAST Journal is published three times a year (November, March and July) by the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology. Members of the Editorial Board are Srs. Maryanne Stevens (Omaha), Joanne Lappetito (Baltimore), Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt (Burlingame), Elizabeth McMillan (Pittsburgh) and Julia Upton (Brooklyn). All correspondence should be mailed to Maryanne Stevens, RSM, 9411 Ohio Street, Omaha, Nebraska, 68134.

New Testament Scholarship Twenty-Five Years After Vatican II[1]

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM

We are presented with a variety of approaches today for the study of the New Testament. Classical historical-critical approaches include text-oriented strategies, such as linguistic and grammatical analysis. Redactional comparisons are made, and form critical categories are applied to individual sections of the scripture. Source criticism hypothesizes the oral traditions and documents that lie behind the development of a particular biblical book or passage. Historical critics consider the political and social milieu in which the biblical texts were composed, and they examine archeological findings and inscriptions to identify persons, locales and events to which the texts refer. Historical-critical approaches can be either textual (study of the text as a self-contained world) or contextual (examining the historical and political world "outside" the text itself). The more recent "new method" called the sociological study of the New Testament is actually a specification of contextual approaches of historical criticism. The "new method" called literary criticism, sometimes narrative criticism, takes seriously the compositional aspects of the scriptures. This method, which is text-oriented, expands many of the same questions which concern the form critic.

Biblical spirituality addresses the interpretation of texts from the perspective of a community's lived experience.

Theologians' training in systematics is typically stronger than their preparation in Scripture. Those who start from a theological method consider how the scriptures arise from doctrinal positions of writers and represent responses of communities to debates over pastoral practice and belief. They often consider a "salvation history" framework, interpreting scripture within a trajectory of creation, fall, incarnation, redemption, resurrection and judgment. Theologians also "draw out" of scripture the explanation for sacraments, ethical principles, and doctrines about Jesus, Church, magisterium and ministry. Theological interpretation has been closely tied to historical-critical methods. In past generations of Catholic scholarship, it has sometimes been difficult to tell whether theological positions emerged from the texts themselves, or whether scripture was being used to provide "proof-texts" of positions maintained by those in authority.

Biblical spirituality addresses the interpretation of texts from the perspective of a community's lived experience. This methodological approach is actually a composite of several others. It considers the theological themes embodied in biblical narratives in their final canonical form in scripture. Spirituality, understood as a set of questions about the relationship of believer and God, is especially fruitful in the interpretation of biblical narrative, parable, and biography. It looks less to the hypothetical layers of historical sources than to the pastoral understanding of the text which expresses the community's understanding of God, and inspires individuals with hope and direction for their lives.

Feminist criticism takes for granted the male-oriented bias of the biblical tradition. The presence of women in the community of faith was generally overlooked or downplayed for thousands of years. Women in scripture mirror their traditionally subordinate status in society. Feminist theologians who claim the scriptures can still be revelatory for women engage in retrieval of the shreds of evidence about women's roles. They re-think and re-interpret what revelation in history means. They reconstruct narratives to show how the original clarity of women's leadership was downplayed by pastoral editing of the biblical record. They challenge theological positions based on a scriptural "proof" of women's subordination. They take male theologians to task and challenge men's constructs of Church, ministry, and the nature of woman. These constructs have been formulated within and reinforced by a biblical tradition which is largely the record of men talking to other men about their understanding of God. Christian feminists claim that their voice has been silent for 2,000 years in the construction and interpretation of the New Testament. Today, women's voice incarnates a whole new period of God's revelation to be offered to the Church.

Liberation theology is actually closely allied with feminist criticism. Impoverished Christians in third-world countries know well the meaning of suffering, hope for redemption, and the coming of God's justice. Out of their lived experience of economic and social oppression, they read the Gospels as addressed to them. They see the ministry of Jesus directed especially toward the poor and alienated. They interpret the kingdom of God as Jesus' own vision of a renewed social order to be established not in the hereafter but now. They read the passion and resurrection narrative with special immediacy, for many of their leaders have faced persecution and death as a result of their solidarity with the poor and their commitment to social jus-

tice. This vision has been inspired by an experience-oriented reading of Scripture, and it provides a new language for theological reflection and formulation of doctrine.

Some feminists, along with liberation theologians, claim that revelation in Scripture is not uniform. Those passages which confirm patriarchal subordination of one group to another are not truly God's revelation. Those passages which reinforce values which result in economic, social or political oppression are not really inspired by God. Many passages reflect the human limitations of the composers. God truly speaks through the scriptures, but this revelation must be tested by the lived experience of those who are the subordinate and the voiceless.

The Present Challenge for Catholic Biblical Scholars

I would like to discuss briefly three pastoral situations which have an impact on our choice of a favored method for doing biblical interpretation: 1) the high cost of ecclesial approval to do historical critical study 2) the voice of women making itself heard in the Church and 3) the relationship of theologians to magisterium. Then, I will reflect on an additional four factors and the challenges they represent: 1) the paradigm shift from theological language to philosophical language, 2) biblical method as requiring a coalition of text and context-oriented strategies rather than disintegration into specialty fields, 3) implications of the reclaiming of subjectivity in the interpretive enterprise, 4) the need for a pastoral theological paradigm for biblical studies, what I will call the social ethics of validity.

A Parable from the Rosenblatt Talmud

The kingdom of biblical interpretation may be compared to a plumber with a tool box who digs trenches, sets pipes in the ground from the water source to the family's house, joins the pipes so that water flows through them, and adjusts the pressure to force the water into the kitchen taps. A plumber's job is done when the family members in the house turn on the kitchen taps and the water they need flows out. Again, the kingdom of biblical interpretation is like a broken pipe that a plumber repairs. If the pipes break or get clogged, the plumber with a tool box gets called back to fix the leak, replace the broken parts, and set the flow aright, so that it can flow in and out of the house-pipes freely. Therefore, I say to you, plumbing is hidden, often messy work, but absolutely essential to the maintenance of domestic life. You who have hands to dig, and eyes to judge, choose carefully the kinds of pipes you set down in the trench.

Interpretation of the Parable

There are certain basics to plumbing that have never changed in centuries, not even since Vatican II. People can't live without access to the living water of revelation. Water from one place, in scripture and in tradition, needs to be channeled via cemented aquaduct, ceramic pipe, lead pipe, copper pipe or plastic pipe, to another place, where people live their daily lives.[2] Someone needs to do this hard work of trench-digging and pipe-laying which is at once drudgery and science, invention and service. At the same time, I think we have discovered in the last twenty-five years that we need more tools in our methodological tool-box than when first we began our apprenticeship. Or some practitioners claim we do. How heavy a box do we need? We confront two choices: keep the methodological box we first got and keep doing the basic job of interpreting texts, junking many of the new tools as superfluous to the basic job we were trained to do well. Or, we can become plumbers who specialize in certain kinds of construction or repair jobs, keeping our tool box of methods light enough to transport ourselves from one job to another. Part of the challenge since Vatican II is to decide what needs to be in the methodological tool box, and that decision is beset by several pressures.

1. The High Cost of Approval for Catholic Use of the Historical Critical Method. One factor is certainly the great cost at which Catholic biblical scholars won magisterial approval for using the historical-critical method, and indeed all the tools appropriate to linguistic, historical and literary analysis of biblical texts. The use of the historical-critical method by Catholic scholars, put at the service of advancing the critical questions, represented a battle within the church. Historical-criticism was an alien, Protestant, academic approach, which threatened Catholic doctrinal orthodoxy. The struggle was won at the cost of the blood of this association's own members, as documented in Fogarty's *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship*.[3]

When I took my first course in New Testament theology as an undergrad at Santa Clara in 1963, this battle and blood-letting over the right to be historical critics had already been won. I began my study of the New Testament largely unaware of this cost. In using various aspects of hermeneutical theory, literary analysis and feminist criticism in my own work, I am in dialogue with scholars who watched their friends suffer professionally in the 50's and 60's. The use of a particular methodology as an ideological choice today may not take into account the deep emotional and professional investment required of Catholic scholars just to engage in historical critical study. It is difficult for some historical critics to spontaneously affirm "other methods" as valid because of the cost to get ecclesial affirmation for historical critical study.

2. The Troublesome Voice of Theologically Educated Women. Another factor affecting the discussion about the proliferation of methods is the dialogue with women. It is disconcerting to male exegetes that even basic and essential tools, such as

form and redactional critical analysis, cannot always repair the breaks in the pipe or get the water into the place where women suffer and struggle to give expression to their spiritual lives within the Church. What do women want? What will keep them happy and prevent their explosions of rage?

No matter how sincere or credentialed the exegetical effort, it remains very troublesome for women that certain N.T. texts get enshrined in the 1988 papal document *Mulieris Dignitatem.* For example, Jesus' rescue of the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11) does offer men a model for reverencing women and rescuing them from the harm done by patriarchy. However, it proposes for women the model of a nameless sinner who shows contrition, a woman victimized by the legal system who remains passive throughout the ordeal. Another text highlighted by John Paul II for reflection on the meaning of womanhood and the relation of men and women within the Church is the marriage metaphor (Eph. 5:21-33). "Wives be subject to your husbands" still resonated with domestic social conventions prior to Vatican II. But since that time, we have been confronted with rather sobering American statistics about domestic relations. Every 3 minutes a woman somewhere is beaten as a victim of domestic abuse. Every five or six minutes a woman is raped. Every ten minutes a little girl is sexually molested by an older male. Susan Thistlethwaite in *Sex, Race, and God* calls attention to the experience of violence that unites white and black women, despite many differences otherwise in their social status, and their economic and political advantages.[4]

...increasing pastoral visibility of women is affecting, or should be, the sort of reflection we bring to scripture.

In contrast to the use of scripture in the U.S. Bishops' *Partners in Redemption* and *One in Christ Jesus*, the Canadian Bishops took a very different approach to women's issues and the relation of N.T. texts to the situation of women in the Church. Their 1989 pastoral letter *Heritage of Violence* gave short shrift to biblical exegesis, focusing on the social problem of domestic violence and the role of the Church in reexamining the patriarchal structures that contribute to this specific suffering of women.[5]

The Ephesians passage on marriage may well offer some in the community of faith a representation of Christ's love for the Church. However, the social structures out of which the metaphor arises now appear more problematic to women as they assess their historical domestic status and present ecclesial limitations. When this passage receives a magisterial exegesis according to prevailing methods of interpreting Scripture in papal documents, the pipes break in women's kitchens. Whatever is the living water of revelation once carried by this text, it does not reach many women where they live and suffer. So the increasing pastoral visibility of women is affecting, or should be, the sort of reflection we bring to scripture.

3. Tense Relations Between Magisterium and Theologians. A third factor impinging upon the choice of methodology has to do with the relationship between biblical theologians and the magisterium. The "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian" in June, 1990, includes an intriguing passage in paragraph #24:

> *The theologian knows that some judgments of the magisterium could be justified at the time in which they were made, because while the pronouncements contained true assertions and others which were not sure, both types were inextricably connected. Only time has permitted discernment and, after deeper study, the attainment of true doctrinal progress*[6]

This passage seems to suggest that the "not sure" assertions, as they relate to scripture and doctrinal assertion, might be corrected by deeper study of scripture. I would hear this as an encouragement to engage in discernment and deeper study using all and every means at hand to promote doctrinal progress. However, recent relations between magisterium and theologians do not offer much encouragement to theologians who attempt to help the Church attain "true doctrinal progress." In a time of seige, it may be well to keep one's head down. The tension between magisterium and theologians is a factor in the choice of critical method, and methods focused on non-volatile doctrinal assertions within biblical texts might carry a certain appeal for younger exegetes.

In this Instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it is of critical interest to note that the vocation of the theologian in the Church is located within a series of New Testament citations. The absence of formal references throughout the entire document to Hebrew scripture might be of concern to this assembly, since it implies that the relationship between a theologian and divine revelation begins rather late in the history of God's relationship with humanity.

After suggesting three initial pastoral situations that affect the choice of a method for doing biblical exegesis, I'd now like to treat four challenges we face today with a focus on the interpretation of New Testament.

1. The paradigm shift from theological language to philosophical language. The linguistic setting in which many issues have been debated in the last twenty-five years has shifted. In the early 1970's,

the critical questions about scripture were undergirded by establishing the interrelation among inspiration, revelation, tradition and magisterium, with validity of a text tied to an establishment of the historicity of the events described. Now, I believe, the epistemological paradigm for much New Testament work has become more complex. First, the interlocked model of inspiration-revelation-tradition-magisterium-history has shifted except in papal documents, to an interpretive, hermeneutical and text-oriented ball-park. Acknowledgment is now given more formally to the function of the biblical text in its literary expression, the interrelationship of text to reader, and experience to interpretation. Opposing poles of reading community and text compete for the claim of determining validity of interpretation. Some of the "buzz-words" for this shift in current discussion are the "linguistic turn," the "postmodern era," the "post-critical paradigm," and the "post-modern hermeneutic." This paradigm, with its philosophical and text-oriented categories, is represented by phrases in the titles of a few papers presented in 1990 . . . Longergan, deconstructive reading, reader-response, functional redundancy, metaphor and transformation of language, feminist hermeneutical revision. I do not think this shift from theological to philosophical language affects the basic procedures of historical research and textual analysis, but it does suggest a new set of questions with which to begin interpretation.

In *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking,* Werner Jeanrond offers a useful survey of the reader-response discussion the last ten years.[7] His analysis departs at points from a more familiar text, Edgar V. McKnight's *Post-Modern Use of the Bible.*[8] Jeanrond is less sanguine than McKnight about the normative position of the reader in relation to the text. After critiquing the positions of Gadamer, Ricoeur, Iser and Fish, Jeanrond proposes that Tracy's theory of the classic[9] provides the basis for a theory of interpreting scripture. Scripture is a "classic text" disclosing transformative truth that changes a human being by provoking thought and action. This is partly because a classic has the power to expose a paradigmatic perspective.[10]

Are regulatory powers to be attributed to the text or to the reading community? This remains a challenge in sorting our way through the mass of critical literature on reader-response theory. The historical-critical tradition gives the strongest normative power to the text, so I suspect that it is the Gadamer/Iser perspective, which gives magisterial authority to the text rather than the individual reader, that is most resonant with our tradition as Papists. The text vs. reading community tension has yet to be resolved. Which determines a particular passage's validity, especially as we seek "true doctrinal progress" through further study?

2. The pluralism of biblical methodologies. While we admit the existence of various methods for doing biblical interpretation, there may be a tendency to see the multiplicity as loss of disciplinary integrity, intellectual apostasy and betrayal, methodological fragmentation, and degeneration into specialty fields that isolate us from one another. Like the prodigal son, the non-historical-critics have taken the hard-earned money of their historical-critical father, left home, squandered their academic inheritance, and now still expect to be seated at the family table of biblical scholarship. I believe it does make a difference how the multiplicity is viewed. This is the era of co-existent pluralism, the "rainbow coalition" of methodologies.

We are all moving toward the center, no matter the line of inquiry.

I could propose a wheel as the model for organizing the pluralism. We are all moving toward the center, no matter the line of inquiry. Sandra Schneiders offers as an organizing principle, text-oriented strategies contrasted with context-oriented strategies. Her article on hermeneutics in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* may be quite useful here.[11] In reflecting on the implications of this two-fold organizational scheme, the old term "lower criticism" as well as form and redaction criticism actually represent text-oriented strategies. Likewise, the analytical tools we associate with literary criticism are text-oriented: plot, characterization, temporal sequence, duration, gaps and reversals. Comparative linguistics, archeology, and history of the hellenistic and roman periods are context-oriented strategies or fields impacting interpretation of the text. So too, according to this organizational schema, context-oriented strategies would include social scientific approaches, cultural anthropological data, and to some degree, feminist hermeneutics.

Walter Brueggemann, analyzing connections between Isaiah 55 and Daniel 1, in Westermann's festschrift volume in 1989, recognizes both of these directions. On the side of text-oriented studies, there is growing scholarly attention, he says, to "inner biblical interpretation" which permits us to understand texts in fresh ways. Inter-textual reading has emerged as a new methodological possibility. This contrasts with an historical-critical approach which is concerned to place each text firmly in its context of origin. On the context-oriented side, he says, "little by little we are learning to ask socio-political questions of texts."[12]

The challenge in facing the pluralism of methods available to us is well expressed by Bruce Alton, past president of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion. He suggests, as does Gadamer, that empha-

sis should be on the question, rather than the method.

> *Our aims or questions justify . . . our methods; and our methods applied to data justify our answers and their verification . . . (C)ertain outcomes cannot be generated by certain methods. And methods are constrained by the type of questions we ask. We might wish matters were more precise but the rules of the game are flexible and under constant change.*[13]

Some problems require what I call a "coalition of methodologies" to answer a question. An example is the mention of Jephthah as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11:32. From a feminist perspective, I suspect that Jephthah's heroic stature in Hebrews is a patriarchal mis-reading of the story recorded in Judges 11 which ends with the sacrifice of his daughter. It is truly a horrifying record, as Phyllis Trible outlined in her classic analysis of this narrative in *Texts of Terror*. What is needed to approach the problem of the Hebrews citation is a coalition of strategies, both text and context-oriented. Historical-critical procedures, narrative analysis, inner-biblical comparison, rhetorical analysis and reader-response considerations all play a part in arguing that Hebrews is a fervent Christian mis-reading of the Jephthah story.

Understanding of anything requires the engagement of one's imagination.

Interpreting the scripture, I believe, really calls for hermeneutical convergence of methodologies. I don't believe any of these "new methodologies" — literary criticism, feminist hermeneutics, social scientific study and biblical spirituality — are all that new. At root, they are strategies which represent a refinement of text and context-oriented approaches whose lines were originally suggested by historical-critics themselves.

3. Reclaiming of subjectivity, creativity and imagination. As interpreters of the biblical text, many of us may have taken either public or private vows to remain perpetually objective, or perhaps it was a nazirite vow to be objective only for a stated time. In any event, one major feature of the new hermeneutic is its sublime trust in the human subjectivity, imagination, intuition and creativity. When humans speak language and generate texts, they are giving expression to a creative process. When humans understand speech, and interpret its meaning, either in conversation or in text, they must bring to the exercise subjectivity, imagination, and creativity. It is the nature of language to be polyvalent, says Ricoeur. Understanding of anything requires the engagement of one's imagination. We are makers of meaning. Subjectivity has thus been redeemed from its place of exile and brought back into the house of biblical criticism where it attends to many of the tasks required for the interpretive and meaning-making process.

Another evidence of the redemption of subjectivity is reader-oriented criticism. Great attention is devoted to a description of the readers encounter with the story, and entry into the process of being engaged by its question. The individual reader has expectations which are sometimes met and sometimes reversed. Describing the process of reading the gospel narrative is really an attempt to identify the subjectivity of the reader in constant interaction with the narrative.

One major challenge in this renewed encounter with subjectivity and creativity is to determine where the controls are within the biblical text itself. Standard tools of literary criticism to identify the author's clear marks upon the text have been available for several decades, but not in conventional use by most Christian exegetes trained in the historical critical method. Meir Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* will remain a classic in describing these markers, even though his application of critical theory and analysis is focused on Hebrew scripture. The tools of literary criticism have been nuanced and applied to biblical narrative by several Israeli scholars, including Jeffry Tigay, Emmanuel Tov, Shemaryahu Talmon, and Yair Zakovitch.[14]

The assumption of literary critics is that choices made by the author in the act of creative composition represent the "mind of the author." We're not going to discover the "author's intention" anywhere but in the text itself. The author's decision, choice, and purpose, are to be found in the pen-lines, the commas, the quotation marks, the periods and the parentheses. The author is invisible and inaccessible except at the clear but subtle divisions where narrative shifts to conversation, where some scenes are drawn out and others abbreviated, or where the normal chronological sequence is distorted in some way. An author is not a quilt-maker, sewing bits and pieces of tradition together, but a true weaver who gives shape and texture to the unified narrative. This is the assumption of narrative critics, as well as those who apply strategies and analytical categories specific to literary criticism.

Sternberg proposes that the rules that govern fiction also govern biblical narrative. This does not make the use of literary analysis non-historical, because it is the very nature of the biblical narrative to re-cast historical event into a fictional mode. Historians are not objective reporters, but they recreate events to make them intelligible to their faith communities. They fill in gaps. They fictionalize as part of communicating history as story. The ideology carried by the aesthetic construction of the biblical narrative will yield its meaning to the interpreter who respects the nature of the text.

We are becoming more conversant with the literary conventions which govern fictional composition. Rev. Frank Maloney from Australia, Visiting Professor at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem in 1990, is preparing a study of the first four chapters of John entitled *Belief in the Word: John 1-4*. He describes a compendium of standard tools of literary criticism as the contents of his methodological tool-box: identification of narrative units, understanding their relationship to one another in the Gospel as a whole, giving attention to the rhetoric used by the author, noting relationships between incidents, inclusions, chiasms, the use of key words, foreshadowing and retrospection, double-meaning words, the deliberate use of misunderstanding and irony, details of time, scenes, space and character.[15] Intention of the author is not a theological idea, but indicated by factual markers within the text he or she composed. By "marker" is meant a clear grammatical division, such is the line where dialogue ends and narrative begins. We may call them seams or redactional features in the language of historical criticism. Classical literary criticism, however, provides a set of strategies and analytical tools for naming what is happening in the narrative taken as a whole. Some definitions of rhetoric are helpful, such as "the whole range of linguistic means by which a discourse constructs a particular relationship with an audience in order to communicate a message."[16]

What is a valid interpretation for men can be unacceptable to women.

4. Validation of interpretation will remain an issue. Validation according to strictly historical-critical norms. i.e. one meaning, supported by linguistic, historical and doctrinal assertions, is no longer the norm. An interpreter cannot reduce the true meaning of a text to one right conclusion, like the solution to a math problem, if one accepts the premises of the new hermeneutics. What is a valid interpretation for men can be unacceptable to women. Reading the evidence of women's possible sacramental ordination to diaconal ministry in the early church produces different conclusions when men read the texts. Feminists have repeatedly called attention to the fact that social preconceptions about woman's nature as receiver and responder, someone who is open to maternity, will condition the interpretation of any biblical evidence about her.[17]

For example, in approaching the question of Luke's relation to the Jews and Judaism in the Gospel and Acts, Jack T. Sanders and David Tiede arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions. They use the same methodological approach, a synchronic thematic reading. Tiede maintains that Luke was sympathetic in relation to Judaism, and Sanders argues for Luke's antipathy toward Judaism.[18]

D. Moody Smith states the problem of establishing validity clearly enough:

> *. . . the anti-Jewish aura of the Fourth Gospel is a misreading of the text, and, presumably, of the intention of its author(s). Nevertheless, it is a misreading that has all too easily and understandably arisen in the history of Christian exegesis, and it may be well-nigh impossible to put it to rest in all the circles in which the gospel is read and treasured.*[19]

Since I do not believe there is anything we can clearly name "the right method" the choice of method cannot be in itself the ultimate norm for valid interpretation. Choosing a feminist hermeneutic, social scientific strategy, or narrative analysis, as opposed to a classical historical-critical approach, will not guarantee the validity of the interpretation, or the transformative effect of what I say. Just as biblical method has ceased to be single approach, what is typically North American is no longer a univocal pastoral norm, given the ethnic and cultural pluralism representing our communities of faith. The pastoral needs of the church are represented chiefly by the needs of women.

An ethics of validity requires several elements. First, it acknowledges the demographic facts about the Church's constituency, its gender balance and its ethnic pluralism. Second, it asks the question, "What happens to the community itself as a result of holding to this interpretation as normative and valid?" Third, validity is also tested by the effect of the interpretation on those who are defined as not belonging to the community. Fourth, as we well know, an ethics of validity constantly tests the tension between a normativity "from above" i.e. conformity to tradition, doctrinal formulations and magisterial exegesis in Church documents, and a normativity or validity "from below," a resonance with the experience of women and men of faith.

In closing, I would like to use another water image. Francois Refoulé, writing in the French anthology *The Future of Theology* in 1968, cited a comparison made by Henri de Lubac which may be applicable to us as biblical theologians faced with a sea of many methods. A modified translation from the French goes like this:

> *The spirit is like a swimmer who has to stay afloat in the ocean. Staying afloat means moving ahead in the ocean, extending each stroke, pushing against a new wave. The swimmer pushes past the waves without keeping the waves from coming up again. The waves keep rising, always taking shape again. The swimmer knows quite well that this is part of the process of being carried along and staying afloat, know-*

ing quite well that in themselves, the waves are not very much at all.[20]

I suppose we all need to stay in methodological shape by plunging into the ocean every now and then.

Footnotes

1. This is an edited version of the text presented as a response to the paper of John R. Donahue, S.J., "Biblical Scholarship Twenty Five Years After Vatican II." It was delivered in plenary session at the Catholic Biblical Association, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana, August 15, 1990.

2. The parable and the metaphor of pipe-laying was inspired by my archeological work in Israel during the summer of 1990. I was working at the site of an aesclepion, or hellenistic healing shrine, at Shuni in Galilee. I spent most of two days carefully following the line of a lead-cast pipe in one trench, and carefully digging around it so it could be photographed.

3. Gerald P. Fogarty, *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A History from the Early Republic to Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

4. Susan Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 126-141.

5. *Violence en Héritage? Réflexion pastorale sur la violence conjugale*. Comité des affaires sociales del' Assemblée des éveques du Québec (Montreal, 1989).

6. "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", *Origins*, Vol. 20, No. 8 (July 5, 1990), 117-126.

7. Werner Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*. Trans. by Thomas J. Wilson from the German (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986) (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

8. Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988).

9. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

10. Jeanrond, 141.

11. Sandra Schneiders, *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1158-60.

12. Walter Brueggemann, "A Poem of Summons (Is. 55:1-3) / A Narrative of Resistance (Dan. 1:1-21)" in *Schöpfung und Befreiung: Für Claus Westermann zum 80. Geburstag*. Eds. Rainer Albertz, Friedemann W. Golka, Jürgen Kegler. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1989) 126-36.

13. Bruce Alton, "Before Method: Cognitive Aims in the Study of Religion," *Studies in Religion* 18 (1989) 420.

14. See the essays in Jeffrey Tigay (ed). *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

15. Francis Maloney, S.D.B. *Belief in the Word*, Chapter 1, unpublished manuscript. The author kindly shared his draft during my summer, 1990, visit to the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem.

16. Publisher's notice for Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*. JSOT Supplement Series 82, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, Ltd., 1990).

17. Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, "La nature de la femme et l'identité féminine," *Concilium* 214 (November, 1987), 130.

18. See the volume of essays edited by Joseph Tyson, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988).

19. D. Moody Smith, "Judaism and the Gospel of John" in *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future*, ed. by James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 82-83.

20. Francois Refoulé, "Parole de Dieu and langage des hommes" *Avenir de la Théologie*, ed. F. Refoulé, C.-J. Geffré, J.-M. Pohier, C. Duquoc (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1968) 51. Citation is from Henri De Lubac's *Sur les chemins de Dieu*, (1966), 142.

The Tradition of the Rejected Prophet

Judith Schubert, RSM

With the inauguration of the Institute, this year marks a new era for us as Sisters of Mercy. It is the moment that we join together to bring God's mercy to the world. Yet as we minister through our words as well as our actions, we have come to realize there can be no mercy without justice. Moreover, in our attempts to bring mercy and justice we are often misunderstood or even rejected because conflict arises in effecting change. So as not to be discouraged by such reactions, let us address two biblical traditions that illuminate our present day experience: the message of justice and mercy as proclaimed by the prophets, and Israel's opposition to the prophets because of this message.

The biblical prophet was the one who proclaimed God's word for the present moment, often by an appeal to Israel for justice and mercy when it had strayed from the covenant,[1] and a defense of victims of institutional oppression.[2] When the monarchal or religious institution was not just and mistreated the people, the prophet urged the institution to repent and change its attitude.[3] The OT prophet Micah expressed the message of the prophets when he associated mercy and justice: "The Lord requires of you but to do justice (mishpat), and to love mercy (hesed)" (Mic. 6:8).

Mercy . . . is exemplified through continued acts of loving kindness and forgiveness towards others.

Hesed, one of the two terms for "mercy" in the OT, describes a caring action that is associated with the covenant. Mercy (hesed), understood in terms of covenant fidelity, is exemplified through continued acts of loving kindness and forgiveness towards others. The latter description may include the other less used OT term for mercy, namely wombs, which centers on the emotion of familial relationships. The NT term mercy, which combines the two OT meanings, often depicts one's active concern for another.[4] Moreover, mercy is necessary in the administration of justice (mishpat). Both qualities are required in order to fulfill the covenant.

For the prophet to live mercy (hesed) was to do justice (mishpat). Since fidelity to God's covenant was a key issue of prophecy, any breach of that covenant caused unrest between the prophets and the institution. When the prophets preached against Israel's unjust behavior towards minorities,[5] for example, Israel reacted and mistreated the prophets who proclaimed the message of mercy and justice. Consequently, the prophets suffered.

The concept of prophetic suffering is well known in the OT. Prophets such as Amos and Jeremiah suffered because of their ministry. For example, in Amos' oracles against the nations (Am. 1:3-2:16), the prophet condemned Israel for its grave offenses against its own people: "they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals . . . they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way." Israel's reply to Amos, as it had been to its prophets in the past (Am. 2:7, 12), was to command the prophet's silence: "O seer, go, and flee away . . . but never again prophesy at Bethel" (Am. 7:12f). Jeremiah, a later prophet, endured a similar yet stronger mistreatment because he was a prophet. Although he urged the inhabitants of Jerusalem to "amend your ways and your doings" (Jer. 7:3a; 5f) and "act justly one with another" (Jer. 7:5b), he was rejected by them through their insults and imprisonment (Jer. 20:1f). The burden of rejection became so great that he lamented to God: "I have become a laughing stock all day long: everyone mocks me!" (Jer. 20:7).

Israel's obstinancy and rejection of the prophets appear most clearly in Deuteronomistic literature.[6] O.H. Steck proposes the following literary schema in the portrayal of the prophets by the Deuteronomic author:[7]

A. A continually disobedient people
B. God's warning through the prophets
C. Rejection of the prophet by the people
D. Divine judgment

The four-part literary schema describes the interaction between God and His chosen people through the mediation of the prophet. Israel refused to accept the prophet who is divinely chosen as God's mouthpiece. The literary schema underscores the common rejection of God's prophets.

In the New Testament the tradition of prophet rejection culminates in the rejection of Jesus, who is the greatest of the prophets. For example, in Luke-Acts, Jesus, in his inaugural sermon at Nazareth, reminded the townspeople that "no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown" (Lk. 4"24). This prophecy was realized, when at the conclusion of the sermon, the people "were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff" (Lk. 4:28bf).

As a result of the negative reaction of the townspeople, Jesus left Nazareth both to preach and to heal throughout Galilee and Judea. Despite an initial rejec-

tion of Jesus's ministry, he continued to bring salvation to others. Jesus restored people's bodies as well as their hearts. Along with his miracle-working he offered salvation in the form of forgiveness of sins (aphesis).[8] Whether it be to the women who were marginalized by society,[9] or to others rebuked by society,[10] Jesus responded with justice and mercy. In his actions and in his speech, Jesus was both acknowledged as the Prophet (Lk. 7:16; 24:19; Acts 2:22) and rejected as the Prophet (Lk. 13:33; Acts 3:13f; 7:52).

Furthermore, it is the Prophet Jesus, whose violent fate in the gospels exemplifies another tradition associated with the prophets, which blossomed in the first century, namely, the tradition of prophet murder. After the death of Jesus, Luke records in Acts that Jesus' prophetic disciples also preached and performed "wonders and signs" (Acts 6:8), yet were rejected by the people (Acts 6:11-14), even to the point of death (Acts 7:58; 8:1). Despite the negative reactions that they received, these disciples, who are presented as prophets by Luke, faced the inequity of their day, and in its place brought God's freeing "good news" to the people.

. . . we . . . may be called to be God's mouthpiece . . .

From what has been discussed we see that a long tradition of resistance against justice and mercy has plagued biblical history since the time of the prophets. Today, we, like the biblical prophets, may be called to be God's mouthpiece when, for example, we revitalize present ministries or embark on new ones. Like them, we minister in a society where there is an unequal distribution of resources. Therefore, inspired by the biblical prophets, we must bring mercy to others through our actions against unjust structures and circumstances, and through our speaking out against the attitudinal indifference of those who witness or cause such injustice to the disenfranchised.

As daughters of Catherine, we continue her special interest in the plight of women. Therefore, we bring mercy to others' lives with a feminine perspective, i.e., with a special interest in the struggle of women. Feminism in many ways may be viewed as a prophetic movement. Like prophecy, it examines the status quo, pronounces judgment, calls for repentance,[11] and urges a change of heart in order to redeem the future for women.

We, in the tradition of Catherine, are part of this struggle for women. If and when our efforts to bring "good news to the poor . . . and proclaim release (aphesis) to captives" (Lk. 4:18) is met with opposition, let us find courage from the prophets of old and above all from Jesus, who brought God's mercy and justice into the hearts of those whom he encountered. It is only when justice prevails that mercy can be effected and peace can be realized. There can be no peace without justice or mercy. Finally, if our efforts, like those of the prophets, are met with rejection, let us not be afraid. Rather, let us be assured that our struggle is not in vain, for ultimately, we touch the hearts of others with God's mercy.

Footnotes

1. Am. 5:15, 24; Hos. 12:6; Jer. 22:13, 15f.

2. Am. 1; 2; Mic. 3:1-3.

3. Is. 1:16f.

4. E.g., Lk. 10:37, where "mercy" describes the action of the Samaritan. See: R. Bultmann, Mercy in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament II (TDNT)*, ed. by G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., Co., 1964), 479-82.

5. Jer. 5:28.

6. Deuteronomistic literature refers to the historical books from Joshua through II Kings. Sometimes the term is used to include the book of Deuteronomy.

7. O.H. Steck (*Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten* WMANT 23 [Neukirchen: Newkirchener Verlag, 1967], 68ff) discusses this literary outline in his monumental work on the persecution and fate of the prophet.

8. The verb is used by Luke to denote forgiveness of sins: Lk. 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. The greek term aphesis means to release, to grant freedom. Luke has intentionally chosen this verb in his two volume work to describe the greatest gift that Jesus offers as salvation, namely, release from enslavement and oppression (Lk. 4:18) as experienced by sin. Therefore, for Luke aphesis denotes "forgiveness of sins."

9. E.g., the widow of Nain, who because of her status and the death of her only son was left without any financial, political, or social resources in society (Lk. 7:11-17); the woman of the city, who was described by Luke as a sinner and thus, unacceptable to the Jews (Lk. 7:37f, 47f). In the last reference, it is noteworthy to remember, however, it is only this woman who is praised by Jesus because of her great love and receptivity to God. In effect, she becomes Jesus' paradigm of Godliness for Simon the Pharisee and the other leaders to follow.

10. E.g., Jesus' sensitivity to the plight of the hated Samaritans is demonstrated in Lk. 10:30-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Here, above the well respected Jewish leaders, the Samaritan exemplifies the person of God — the one whose attitude and action truly please God, and, thus all to which others should aspire.

11. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror. Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

Teaching Parishioners How to Pray with Scripture

Sharon Kerrigan, RSM

Do not be afraid, for I am with you; stop being anxious, for I am your God. Is. 41:10

The twentieth century has been described as an age of anxiety. While this situation may be painful, it is also hopeful because it characterizes a society in transition. During any transitional era, people begin to question their identity in a variety of ways. Some want to hold on to the past, while others seek to break with the past and create a new society. To assist Christians through this period of transition, Vatican II has encouraged them to return to their roots and reclaim that which continues to give them life.

. . . Scripture . . . the heart and center of ministry.

As a Christian and a member of the Mercy Community, my identity lies within the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Spirit of Catherine McAuley. Both claim Scripture as the heart and center of ministry.

Jesus used Scripture to teach his disciples about God, and Catherine used the Gospels to instruct the novices about Jesus. Reclaiming these roots, challenges us to deepen our understanding of the Scriptures and then let the WORD transform our lives. Our tradition also says once we have rediscovered the meaning of Scripture for ourselves, we are expected to share it. Theoretically this process sounds great, but in practice, it raises a major question for most of us. How might we teach Scripture to a society engulfed in high technology?

One parish in Chicago has found an answer to this dilemma. The staff of Mount Carmel Parish offers its parishioners the opportunity to learn how to pray with Scripture through a directed retreat. Since this method is unique, it could serve as a model for us as we search for new ways of transforming our lives and our society. I, therefore, propose to describe the program briefly, by walking with a retreatant through the process and sharing some options each directee might consider for continual growth.

I. Program: Mount Carmel Parish

Twice a year, Mount Carmel Parish offers a two-week retreat to teach parishioners how to pray with Scripture. The retreat opens on a Sunday afternoon with a lecture, "How to Pray with Scripture." Then, the retreatants meet with their directors to schedule five subsequent appointments.[1] Since most of the participants work, the meeting times vary. As a result, the total group does not meet again until the closing session. The directors, however, meet frequently for dinner in the Center and gather at the end of the first week for peer direction and future planning. The directors join the directees for the closing celebration.

I have been involved with the program for several years, and I would like to share with you one parishioner's faith journey. I shall do this through a case study.

II. Case Study: John Smith

John was one of my directees, and his background is typical of those participating in the program. He is a Catholic with little knowledge of Scripture, in his 30's, and a computer consultant for a downtown firm.[2]

In our initial interview, he said he wanted to learn how to pray with Scripture to deepen his spiritual life. I told him the process he was about to embark upon would assist him in reaching that goal. I then explained that the themes of the retreat were rooted in Ignatian exercises, but the methods for praying with Scripture would vary according to each person's personality. During the next two weeks, I would introduce him to some of these methods. Upon the completion of this brief overview, I introduced John to Ignatius' first theme — God's desire to be in an intimate relationship with us.

Session 1: God's Presence. In the opening session, the group was invited to reflect upon Psalm 139, so I asked John to reread the Psalm and underline the words or phrases that spoke to him. Later, we discussed these words as they related to his relationship with God. I concluded the first session by asking John to articulate a prayer that reflected his relationship with God. John was able to do this and by articulating it, he had begun to integrate Scripture into his life. He now was ready to do some further reflection at home.

For our second meeting, I asked John to read Isaiah 43: 15-19. After reading the passage slowly, he was instructed to ponder a few questions, jot down any insights he might have, and pray for the grace to accept whatever God was asking of him through these insights.

Session 2: God Created Me and I Belong to God. John began the second meeting by sharing his insights, and I presented the second theme. Since the passages for this theme are principally from the Gospel of John and highly symbolic, I invited John to do some imaging before reading Scripture. I chose a

fantasy reading from *Awareness*, entitled, "The Wise Man."[3] The purpose of the exercise is to bring the unconscious or symbolic images to the consciousness level; therefore, making it easier to identify the symbols in Scripture.

We discussed some of the images that emerged from the exercise and then John read Scripture (John 14:16-28). During the fantasy exercise, John had asked the wise man for the gift of peace and said he heard Jesus acknowledging his prayer through John 14! Our concluding prayer picked up on John's gratitude for his gift of peace and his openness to accept Jesus' call to a deeper relationship with him.

Since we were not scheduled to meet for three days, I encouraged John to reread John 14 and Isaiah 43 and jot down any words that continually emerged.

Session 3: Jesus Begins His Mission on Our Behalf. John opened this session by sharing the words that kept emerging for him in all three passages. We discussed their potential meaning for his life and ministry. John's insights led him into Ignatius' third theme — Jesus' mission and our participation in it. To assist John through the transition from activity to contemplation, I suggested he relax for a few minutes by listening to a piece of music. When he was relaxed and centered on God's presence, I read a passage from Luke (4:14-22), and asked him to imagine he was sitting in the synagogue listening to Jesus speak.

During the sharing period, John said he heard Jesus in the synagogue calling him to a more encompassing role in the Church. At this point, John was ready to meditate upon his specific call. I encouraged him to reread Luke at home.

Session 4: Jesus Shows the Depth of His Love in Service to Others. Since John had already recognized God's calling him to a deeper spiritual life, the focus of this session was to bring clarity to his understanding of what his response might mean. I asked him to read John 13:1-17 and reflect upon Jesus' ministry in light of his own inner calling to serve others. John prayed for the Spirit's guidance as he discerned his role in the Church. He later became a minister in a parish.

Session 5: Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. John's openness to the Spirit prepared him for further exploring what his "yes" might imply. I suggested he read Luke 22:54-62 as a preparation for reflecting on Jesus' Passion and Resurrection and the cost of discipleship. He was instructed to read the passage twice — the first time to himself and the second time aloud replacing his name for Peter's. The impact of hearing Jesus calling him by name to be his disciple helped John conceptualize the deep meaning of what it means to acknowledge our Christian heritage.

Since Jesus' Passion-Resurrection symbolize our reincorporation into God's life, I had John read Luke 22 and 24 for his final reflection.

Session 6: Integration of Ideas and Preparation for Closing Session. Our final session consisted of an evaluation of the two-week experience for John, and a preparation for his part in the closing celebrations. Through the process, John was introduced to several methods of praying with Scripture. He experienced centering, imaging and journaling. On the last day of the retreat, he joined the other directees and directors for the concluding exercises.

III. Extension of the Program: Next Steps

The retreat for Mount Carmel parishioners climaxes on the last day. The day's schedule includes: a time for small group sharing, some ideas for further growth in the spiritual life, and a Eucharistic celebration. These culminating events serve as a reminder for all of us of Jesus' call "to go out and bear fruit that will last forever" (John 15:16-17). The parishioners of Mount Carmel Parish choose to express their response to Jesus' call by continually searching for God's WORD in Scripture. They attend Scripture classes at the Center, seek out spiritual direction and/or pray with Scripture daily by following the lectionary. Most parishioners select one or two of these options in order to better prepare themselves for the challenges of today's high tech society.

This program is one of many approaches being used to teach people to pray with Scripture, but the impact it has had upon this Parish indicates it is a powerful approach, and one that reflects our Judeo-Christian and Mercy heritage.

Footnotes

1. This program originated with John Veltri, SJ under the title, *Directed Retreat Goes to Parish.* It was adapted by Benedicta McCorry, RSM for Mount Carmel Parish. For further information, contact Benedicta McCorry, RSM, Carmel Prayer Center, 708 W. Belmont, Chicago, Illinois 60657 or John Veltri, SJ, Guelph Center of Spirituality, Guelph Ontario, Canada.

2. To keep the confidentiality of the retreatant, his name has been changed.

3. John O. Stephens, *Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting, and Experiencing* (New York: Real People Press, 1976), pp. 183-185.

The Gospel According to Mattie, Marcia, Lucy and Joan

Marilyn King, SM

About four years ago I moved to rural Kentucky and began parish ministry as a kind of general practitioner. Soon after I began my work there, I received from the Archdiocesan RENEW office a booklet for Scripture sharing in small groups, designed for members of the archdiocese who lived outside the cities in farm areas. The booklet was an effort on the part of the RENEW planners to help make the Scriptures relevant to these people. I smiled to myself, thinking how citified our approach to the Scripture has become. We now think special efforts need to be made to explain the texts to persons who live simply, close to the land, in touch with the rhythms of nature. These persons live in situations quite similar to the *Sitz im Leben* of the original gospel hearers.

In the years that have passed since I received that RENEW booklet, I have had the opportunity of hearing how the gospels speak directly to "my parishioners." I have been touched especially by stories women have told me about certain gospel texts coming alive in their own experience. What follows are accounts of some of these stories, told me by four women: Mattie, Marcia, Lucy, and Joan. Although I have changed the names of these women and some of the details in order to protect confidentiality, the stories are true.

Mattie

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, (Jesus) said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. (Mt. 14:19b-20a)

Mattie and her husband are dairy farmers. In 1983 they were hit with a double blow to their livelihood: a serious drought which resulted in an increase in the cost of feed for their herd of cows and a new government tax on milk imposed by the Reagan administration. By the following year the family had to sell most of their animals to pay their debts and found themselves with no income from the farm. To help support their seven school-age children, Mattie took house cleaning jobs wherever she could find them.

One afternoon when Mattie arrived home from one of these cleaning jobs, worried about how she was going to feed her family that night, she opened the back door to her kitchen to find the neighboring family all gathered around her kitchen table, waiting for her to come home. "I knew something was strange about this," Mattie recalled for me, "because farmers jes' don't go a-visitin' in the middle of the day." She continued, "Then I said to myself, 'Ha, I know. They came for a meal, a-thinkin' we always managed to have something.'" As a matter of fact, other than the two cows and eight chickens the bill collectors allowed them to keep, and a little bit of sugar and flour in the cupboard, there was no food in the house. "But I jes' didn't have the heart to tell them we was out of food, too. So I smiled big and welcomed them and told them to make themselves to home. Then I turned to the stove, making believe I was going to start a meal and said, 'Lord, I sure wish I know how you did it with them five loaves and two bitty fishes. I'd sure try and pull that trick right now myself.'"

At that point one of her sons came in and Mattie whispered to him, "See if there are any eggs in the hen house," knowing full well they had all been collected from the eight hens yesterday. "Well, do you know he came back with a basket full of twenty-seven eggs! I laughed so hard and said right out loud to the Lord: 'That's how you did it!' I tell you we had the best platter of scrambled eggs and the flattest batch of pancakes in history that day. And everyone left my house smiling and full up."

Marcia

Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41)

Marcia and her alcoholic husband both had drifted away from church-going during their married years. Recently, however, Marcia began to look for sources of strength and guidance which would help her live with the alcoholism of her husband. She started "thinking religion" again. And she began thinking hard when Danny, a neighborhood boy, got killed.

Danny and her son had gone to school together until Danny dropped out of the eighth grade last year. The whole town shook their heads and thought he was following in the footsteps of his father who was "jes' a drunk and a bum," someone the townsfolk could pity and stay away from lest he beg them out of some of their money. Their last house was so filthy and vermin-ridden and such a blight on the community that one of the locals bought it so he could burn it down. And now the family lived next to the gas station in a vacant, dilapidated house with no water. It was shortly after they moved into this place that Danny was killed late one night in a car accident.

It was a sad, pitiful funeral service, the dregs of the town gathered around the casket. Many people commented that Danny's early death saved him from a life of misery and poverty and degradation. But when the family entered the parlor for the wake there was suddenly a sense of dignity that overtook the scene. The entire family looked elegant, neatly dressed, the

father and older sons clean and shaved, the mother and teen-age daughter with attractively groomed hair.

At the back of the funeral parlor stood Marcia. She knew the family had no water for baths and no money for the laundromat. So she invited them all over to her home the night before for showers. She called her sister to help her with their clothes and personal grooming. She had remembered, she later told me, something from her church-going days about giving a cup of water to someone in need and how that was like giving it to Christ himself. "So how about giving a couple of showers? Isn't that even better?"

Lucy

I tell you, to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Luke 19:26)

Lucy is a catechumen, but she can't make it easily to the parish for the RCIA sessions we have on Sunday mornings because of small children at home and a husband who is working two jobs and cannot be relied on to be around for the children. So I meet with Lucy every week in her home which is several miles off a road which itself is off the main highway.

We always begin with a sharing on the Sunday's gospel and this week I was worried about how to handle the text of that week. The parable of the talents always seemed harsh to me, and the words of the master to the third servant, who at least didn't waste or lose any of the master's money, seemed lacking the loving tenderness of God I was encouraging Lucy to come to know and recognize in her own life. I realized how hard that was for her to really accept because she had suffered so many hardships from her poverty and almost prison-like isolation on the farm. But, that passage was in the Scriptures for us to share together that week and so we came together and read them.

Lucy's response surprised me. She had no trouble seeing the point in the parable. She began opening up to me about her own family in ways she never had done before. Like many of the people in this area, Lucy was extremely reticent to speak about her own private life. I guessed it was because there was little a person could be private about in a small community. But this day she told me about her parents who literally lived off their grown children, about her father who refused to work, even though he is quite capable. She spoke of the headaches she still suffers from the guilt of moving away from her parents, who "hid their talents," so she could start a new life with her husband, Tony, whom she called the "miracle of my life." Unabashedly she said she could understand the reprimand given the third servant. Like her parents, this servant needed to hear it, because it was true.

She went on to say that she and Tony were like those who were given a share of the master's money to use. Although they were not increasing it ten-fold, they were using wisely what little they had. They were providing a home for their three children. They were working hard, she at baby-sitting at home and he on his uncle's farm and at a "public" job at a factory thirty miles away. She could hear the words of the Scripture being spoken to her during our prayer time together: "Well done, good servant! You have been faithful in this very small matter. Come share your master's joy."

Joan

Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you." (John 8:11b)

Joan had lived in town for many years, but she stood out as different from the rest for several reasons. For one, she wasn't Catholic in a county which is about 80% Catholic, descendants of the Maryland Catholic community of colonial times. She also had adopted two Korean children and caused heads to turn in this 100% Anglo area. But her most distinctive trait was that she didn't care what people thought of her. She would do and say what she thought was right "even if God thought different." Although such an attitude could easily smack of arrogance and an irreligious independence, almost every time she told me something she didn't believe regarding church teaching or discipline, I had to agree that she was right on the mark in grasping the message of Jesus.

I was convinced of her deeply Christian spirit a few months ago when a news story broke about the arrests of several men in a city park who were "caught in the very act of homosexual behavior." One of them was the elementary school principal of our little town. Shock and disgust abounded in the community. The school board braced itself for an onslaught of homophobic backlash and immediately replaced the principal, as the law dictated.

A parents' meeting was called. During it Joan stood up to testify that the principal was a good principal and he was kind and respectful of the children. "So what if he is gay? He is a human being first of all, and a very good man." After the meeting she phoned the school superintendent and asked him why he was punishing this man for something in his private life when there is no proof that it impairs his job as a school principal. "Even if he did something wrong, let the one among you who has a perfect record write the letter of dismissal."

Shaking a little after that call, she decided to phone the principal himself. She told him, "I don't condemn you. I just want you to know that." To this he replied, "Those words will carry me through this ordeal. I know the Lord is with me and you have assured me of that. Thank you."

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There are many more stories I could share about the gospel being lived out in this twentieth century American equivalent of Jesus' hometown territory and kinfolk. But I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them.

Contributors

Sharon Kerrigan, RSM (Chicago) holds a D.Min. from Chicago Theological Seminary. She is Executive Director of a National Office of Ministry in Chicago and pursues studies in the newly established Ph.D. program in theology at Loyola with an emphasis in Scripture.

Marilyn King, SM (Burlingame) received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, which was preceded by studies at St. Paul University in Ottawa. Her dissertation was on Thomas Merton. Currently she is living in an experimental contemplative setting in Lebanon, Kentucky. She serves as Director of Religious Education for a rural community of St. Francis Parish in St. Francis, Kentucky.

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM teaches New Testament and biblical courses to undergrads and graduates at Santa Clara University in California. She received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley writing her dissertation on Paul as witness in the Acts of the Apostles. She is a member of the Burlingame regional community.

Judith Schubert, RSM (Plainfield) teaches in the Religious Studies department at Georgian Court College in Lakewood, N.J. She is finishing a Ph.D. dissertation in New Testament at Fordham University on the theme of the rejected prophet. She has also studied at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem.

Questions for Study/Reflection

1. Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt details the variety of methods used today to help us understand Scripture. How do you read Scripture today? What changes have occurred in your scriptural interpretations since Vatican II?

2. Rosenblatt argues for a "God (who) truly speaks through the scriptures, but this revelation must be tested by the lived experience of those who are the subordinate and the voiceless." What are the implications of this statement?

3. How do you test the validity of your Scriptural interpretations?

4. Judith Shubert asks "What is your experience of prophesy in today's world?" When have you known one, who although rejected, continued to bring salvation to others?

5. What is your experience of trying to bring justice and mercy to "the people?" What is your experience of being prophetic?

6. How might the experience of "John's" directed retreat (as told by Sharon Kerrigan) inspire you to pray with those among whom you minister?

7. By eavesdropping on Marilyn King's work we hear of God among us, alive and well. Where do you experience the same "good news?"

From Our Readers

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your inaugural issue . . . All three writers made reference to our time-honored phrase: the poor, the sick, and the . . . Two writers said "uneducated" and one said "ignorant." I note that the Constitutions say "ignorant." . . . I think the word used is important because uneducated and ignorant are not synonymous. A student of Catherine McAuley and Irish history once told me that ignorant means ignorance of the faith. One might be educated, but ignorant in this sense. It was this ignorance of the faith that was the focus of Catherine's ministry.

Having taught high school students for a number of years, I know they resent their being classified as ignorant, perhaps this is why the word "uneducated" came to be used. But it is important to us in our attempts to understand better Catherine's charism to know why she deliberately chose the term "ignorant."

Noel Riley, SM
Burlingame, CA

Dear Editor,

Your first issue only reinforced my belief that Catherine saw ways of living Mercy in varied modes. And now, the present-day Mercies are returning to this vision.

Margaret A. O'Brien
Associate in Mercy of New Jersey

Dear Editor,

Hoorah!!!

Marie Michele Donnelly, RSM
Merion, PA

Dear Editor,

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your Journal . . . . I have only one reservation as far as the Associate Programs go. I am a strong supporter of the Associate Program — it is the only way to go! However, I think that we should keep them for women only . . . someday we might be the alternative to an all male oriented church!

Denise Theuiault, RSM
Berlin, NH

Dear Editor,

Congratulations. I read your first issue from cover to cover in one sitting which is unusual for me. I never manage that with LCWR Occasional Papers . . .

Donata Landkamer, RSM
Black Canyon City, AZ

Dear Editor,

Hearty congratulations . . . It arrived here yesterday and I have already finished reading all of it! . . . I continue to have mixed feelings about a separate journal for these articles. Incorporation of them into whatever evolves as a National Mercy publication would be valuable . . . a way of seeing ourselves as thinkers, theologians, reflectors and doers in mainstream Mercy life.

Mary Schmuck, RSM
Cincinnati, OH

What is MAST?

- **What is MAST?**

  MAST is the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology.

- **Can I belong?**

  Any member of Mercy who is interested in scholarly writing and speaking about theological concerns is welcome. Remember: Theologians and scripture people need scholars in other fields (history, sociology, philosophy, english, etc., etc., etc.) to keep them in the real world! So, if you are in another field and are inclined to interdisciplinary work with theologians, please consider membership in MAST.

- **When does MAST meet?**

  The annual meeting is held just prior to the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America and the location is determined by the city in which the CTSA is held.

- **Are there dues?**

  Yes, membership dues are $20 per year, payable to Janet Ruffing, MAST treasurer, 2043 Hone Avenue, Bronx, NY, 10461.

- **When and where is the meeting this year?**

  This year, MAST will hold its annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia from Sunday evening June 9, 1991 to noon Wednesday, June 12. Accommodations for MAST will be at the Wyndham Garden Hotel on Hammond Drive, NE (404-252-3344). A special price for the MAST meeting is $50 per room per night, the same price whether one or two persons stay in the room. Hotel includes pool, whirlpool and exercise room. The MAST meeting and meals will be at the nearby St. Joseph's Hospital of Atlanta (a Baltimore regional community sponsored facility). Cost of meals at the hospital will be covered by a grant from the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy.

- **What goes on at these meetings?**

  Plenary sessions and special interest sessions are arranged based on participants' ideas gathered at the previous meeting. An executive committee plans each year's meeting sending out an agenda to those on the mailing list in April.

- **How do I get on the mailing list?**

  Call or write:
  Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM
  MAST Program Director
  1081 Portola Avenue
  San Jose, California, 95126
  (408) 985-9189

- **How do I register for the June, 1991 meeting?**

  Call or write:
  Joanne Lappetito, RSM
  St. Joseph's Hospital
  5665 Peachtree Dunwoody Road
  Atlanta, Georgia, 30342-1701
  (404) 851-7001, ext. 7613
  (404) 255-6427