



The **MAST** *Journal*

Recently Published Books

The Biography of Catherine McAuley

Mary Sullivan, R.S.M.

A Mosaic of Catherine

Marilyn King, R.S.M.

What's Theology Got To Do With It? Religious Life in Crisis

Judith Schaefer, O.P.

H. A. Reinhold and Liturgical Renewal

Julie Upton, R.S.M.

Art-Journaling and the Circle of Mercy

Marianne Hieb, R.S.M.

Also Born of the Fire – Poetry

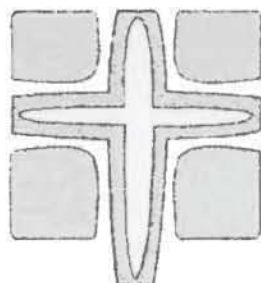
Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.

Priscilla and Aquila: Then and Now

Noel Keller, R.S.M.

Jonah: A Parable of Transformation

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.



Summer, 2012

Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions, and Friends of Mercy,

The inspiration for this issue, "Recently Published Books," grew out of the practice of *The MAST Journal* to do occasional book reviews of works written by Sisters of Mercy and Associates. A book review is conventionally done by another reader, who has some experience in the same academic field as the author. In the course of one editorial board meeting, we asked ourselves a question, "What if the author herself were to write an introduction or provide an overview of her work?" We acknowledged that in many cases, Sisters might not be able to actually purchase the book. Nevertheless, we wanted the Mercy membership to know that the book was published, and to have some acquaintance with its content, more than just seeing an announcement about it.

The intellectual gifts of women religious abound as a treasure in the Church. The Vatican's Congregation for Doctrine and the Faith has focused this year on the Investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and there has been uncertainty about the outcome of the rocky road of "dialogue" between LCWR and bishops appointed to guide its reform. The controversy over "doctrine" deflects attention from the irreplaceable ministerial contributions of women religious as seen in the national tour of the "Women of Spirit" exhibit, as well as their thoughts.

What do women religious think and what do they write about, and how is their mission different from the preaching of certain doctrines that the bishops want to impose on them? A sample can be found here. The offering is incomplete, and I regret that some Mercy authors who had recently published works were not reviewed in this particular issue. There will be an effort to make amends.

We celebrate, of course, the indefatigable, thorough and irreplaceable research of Mary Sullivan, R.S.M. in her awaited biography of our foundress, *The Path of Mercy: The life of Catherine McAuley*. For every writer of a biography, this is an outline for what sources to consult. Since our lives and personal identities are more than a series of assignments where we were posted, I encourage Sisters to write about their own lives in memoir-writing groups and guided-autobiography sessions. There may not be a researcher like Mary Sullivan after we die to write our biographies, so it may be well that we take up and write our own stories. Mary Sullivan's list of sources is a resource not only for biographers, but also autobiographers.

While we have the view of the author, Marilyn King, R.S.M., subsequently performs the traditional service of a reviewer who has read the whole book and provides an overview from the perspective of a reader. Marilyn calls attention to research which corrects such "urban legends" in Mercy history that "Catherine didn't want to found a religious community," and that her last words referred to "a comfortable cup of tea."

A couple of years ago, Linda Werthman, R.S.M., then serving on the Institute Leadership Team, alerted me to a book on the vow of obedience written by **Judith Schaefer, O.P.** She described its up-dated focus on obedience as the fruit of “communal discernment.” When I tried to purchase *The Evolution of a Vow: Obedience as Decision-Making in Communion* as a dissertation, it cost about \$150.00 from Lit Verlag of Berlin. I didn’t think it would be purchased by many women religious. So I contacted Judy Schaefer herself, and asked if she would write an essay for this issue of *MAST Journal* summarizing her approach. I am grateful for her alacrity. Since Catherine McAuley named Catherine of Siena as one of her patrons, it is fitting that a sister of St. Dominic be included among the Mercies here. The book is now in paperback for \$35.00.

Hans Angar Reinhold was a German priest and liturgist who emigrated to the U.S. in the 1930’s and was active in the liturgical renewal movement prior to Vatican II. Many of us remember the transition from the Mass in Latin to Mass in English. No one told us about the theological and pastoral inspiration that Father Reinhold voiced. **Julia Upton, R.S.M.**, points up his contributions to *Commonweal* in this essay, which highlights her full-length biography, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: The Life and Legacy of H.A. Reinhold* (Liturgical Press, 2009). Over the past years, as Julie was researching her book, MAST members enjoyed several stage-by-stage presentations of her work at the annual meeting.

Marianne Hieb, R.S.M., a trained artist, experienced retreat director and journal-workshop leader, wrote a book which serves as a guide for retreatants, *Inner Journaling Through Art Journaling: Learning to See and Record Your Life As a Work of Art* (London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2006). It’s about \$25.00. The advantage of this generous essay is that a reader can take up some of the suggestions given here and apply them to her own contemplative practice. As Marianne says, the approach is good for visual artists because they have to pin down their insights with words, and for verbal learners, it helps them balance their wordiness by translating reflection into an image.

I approached **Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.**, a poet who has published in *The MAST Journal* several times, and said that I’d like to feature her own volume, *Also Born of the Fire: A Book of Poetry* (Outskirts Press, 2008). It’s \$12.00. Poetry is a demanding craft. It is a distillation of language and thought. What distinguishes this essay is Patricia Ryan’s self-revelation, how she came to be a poet, what prompts her writing, and how her environmental passions and political outlook inspire her work. We all jot down things to remember in “notebooks, on the backs of envelopes, in retreat journals and on scraps to paper.” The difference here is that her writings proved publishable and are collected in this precious volume of poetry.

Marie Noel Keller, R.S.M., a scholar of New Testament, and experienced leader of tours to archeological sites in the Middle East, has published a study, *Priscilla and Aquila: Paul’s Coworkers in Christ Jesus* (Liturgical Press, 2010, \$14.00). Her volume is part of a series edited by Bruce Malina, called *Paul’s Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith*. The series is notable for enlarging our knowledge about little-known figures mentioned in Paul’s letters and Acts of the Apostles, such as Stephen, Titus, Epaphros, and Phoebe. What is unique about Noel’s study is her discussion of a missionary couple, not just an individual, and her suggestion that they are the ones who did the catechetical preparation for Paul in Corinth, assuring him of success when he arrived on the scene.

With Elaine Pacheco, R.S.M., this writer and editor took part as a co-leader of an unconventional retreat-on-line that was one of the choices for the West Midwest's Mercy Transforming Transforming Mercy slate of retreat offerings. In May of 2011, she composed her commentary, *Jonah: A Parable of Transformation*. It was distributed to retreatants in fall of 2011 and spring of 2012, but is published here for the first time. It is a very long commentary on a short biblical book by a short woman. That may be enough as introduction.

Following the example of these writers, may readers find themselves inspired to leave a record for the church, for the community, and for their families, of what they have thought and felt, and what they have written. After you "take up and read," as the angel said to Augustine, may you "take up and write" yourself.

Gratitude to Judy Ward, R.S.M. for laying out this issue. *The MAST Journal* anticipates going on-line and mounting a web-site that will give access to it's 20-plus years of back issues.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eloise M. Rosenblatt".

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

The Biography of Catherine McAuley

Mary Sullivan, R.S.M.

Sisters of Mercy and Associates have inquired about *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley* now completed. It was published by the Catholic University of America Press (Washington) and by Four Courts Press (Dublin) in February 2012. It is hardbound, and the retail cost is \$49.95 though bookstores, who get a discount, may be able to sell it for less.

Certain features of the biography may be relevant to how we will read this and other writings about Catherine McAuley; how we will interpret her life and write about it ourselves; and how fully we will understand our common mission of mercy that Catherine founded. Catherine McAuley research has reached the stage where further accuracy and detail, insofar as we can achieve these, are needed. Our admiration of her as our Founder is dependent on our knowledge of her, as is our grasp of the way of life and mission of mercifulness to which we are all called. We will benefit from knowing as much as we reliably can about the full story of her life, her work, and her God-given virtue. And for this we now have many resources.

Paramount among these resources are her own writings, most of which are already available to us: her letters, the "Rule and Constitutions" she composed, her "Spirit of the Institute" essay, her instructions, and the prayers she is known to have composed. We also have biographical manuscripts and letters written about her by her contemporaries, Sisters of Mercy who lived with her, worked with her, rode stage coaches and canal boats with her.

Therefore the writing of this biography of Catherine McAuley, the first full-length and fully-documented published biography we have had of her in over fifty years, has been guided by the following methods and principles:

- I have not relied on secondary sources—that is, on previously published biographies and other treatments of Catherine McAuley, as valuable as many aspects of these certainly are. These works go all the

way back to Mary Vincent Harnett's biography in 1864 and Mary Austin Carroll's biography in 1866.

- Instead I have relied chiefly on primary sources—that is, on documents that came from her hand, or from her contemporaries' hands.
- I have also used public documents recorded in her own time—for example, property deeds of places where she lived, Dublin newspapers, official records of the Baggot Street poor school, building contracts she signed, coach and canal boat schedules, descriptions of the towns and cities where she made foundations, and records at the Presentation convent, George's Hill.
- I have used prayers that Catherine herself composed, and prayers that she is known to have prayed often—like the penitential psalms edited and paraphrased by Francis Blyth.
- I have tried to use only what I take to be her authentic "sayings," of which there are many—not supposed sayings whose wording has been altered or ones that have been incorrectly attributed to her.
- I have used newspaper accounts she wrote—like her announcements about forthcoming bazaars and charity sermons on behalf of the House of Mercy and the poor families the sisters visited, and the thank-you notices she wrote and published in Dublin newspapers.
- I have used statistics about the severe poverty in Dublin and Ireland during her time, including data about the prostitution and fears of it in Dublin, and descriptions of the slums where she and the sisters visited.
- I have sought and used medical information—about the cholera epidemic in Dublin in 1832, about typhus, tuberculosis and other diseases rampant

in Ireland during the early nineteenth century, about the state of medical knowledge at the time, about the medical professionals in Catherine's own family, and the medical practitioners who attended Catherine and other sisters at Baggot Street.

- I have used resources in the archives of Apothecaries Hall in Dublin so we could learn more about William Armstrong with whose family Catherine lived after her mother's death, and especially about William Callaghan, her great benefactor. Both were distinguished Dublin apothecaries, and played major roles in the Hall.
- I also visited the Quaker archives in Dublin, where I learned a great deal more about the probable outcome of Catherine Callaghan's early Quaker connection.
- I made extensive use of the letters about her and their family written by Catherine's nephew Willie McAuley. In fact, I found I had to devote a whole chapter to Catherine's relations with him as revealed in these letters and in other documentation of which he was unaware.
- And finally, aspects of Irish history and church history of the period are also included in order that we may better understand the worlds in which Catherine lived and worked. For example, we need to know more about the priests and bishops who were Catherine's good friends and helped her: Edward Armstrong, Michael Blake, Redmond O'Hanlon, Daniel Murray, James Maher, Andrew Fitzgerald, Edward Nolan, Thomas Griffiths in London, and others, as well as about the two priests who made life hard for her: Bartholemew Sheridan and Walter Meyler.

What was the point of all this research? I hope it has helped to give detail and fresh specificity to the context and quality of Catherine McAuley's life and work. I

hope it has corrected some of our received knowledge about her; that it has added greater human flesh and blood to her life; and that it has transformed those who might have been only two-dimensional figures in her life into the real three-dimensional people they were.

Without having been hagiographical in direct intent, I also hope that the biography allows Catherine McAuley to emerge as the very human and very saintly woman she was and is. To the extent that it reveals her human holiness, it will add power and credibility to what she now asks of us, the Sisters of Mercy and our Associates.

**Moreover, in the biography
I have tried not just to
describe her virtues,
but to show them,
in ways more powerful
than description.
I have also tried to deal fairly,
and honestly, as she did,
with her weaknesses,
her foibles, and her blind spots.
She, like us, had a few of these!**

As you can imagine, the most difficult aspect of writing about Catherine McAuley had to do with describing her virtues and her Christian beliefs and motivations, insofar as these can be inferred: her mercifulness; her confidence in God; her sense of poverty; her charity to all, including the poor and her sisters; her sensitivity to the "Cross of Christ," and her acceptance of what she called "portions" of that cross, in her own life and that of her sisters; her cheerfulness and sense of humor; her self-effacement, and her humility. You would not want to know how many drafts I wrote and revised of the section on her humility!

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ways more powerful than description I have also tried to deal fairly, and honestly, as she did, with her weaknesses, her foibles, and her blind spots. She, like us, had a few of these!

In the chapter on Catherine's "Beliefs and Motivations," I have tried to articulate what I see to be her personal theology, the theology with which she got out of bed each morning and which increasingly underlay all her actions—a theology contextualized by her time and place and expressed in the language of her day. What would be the central beliefs and motivations of our own lives, if we tried to write them down in some genuine and coherent way?

In the biography I have also attached a rather long Appendix called "A Note on Sources," and I have the temerity to urge people to read it. The detailed research underlying it—on her authentic sayings and instructions—has a direct relevance to our full and reliable understanding of Catherine McAuley's instructions to us. The Appendix deals with several topics, including the phenomenon of transcriptions of passages in previously published sources; the *Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*, published by Mary Bertrand Degnan in 1952; and the *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley*, published by the Sisters of Mercy in St. Louis in 1888 and again in 1927; as well as *The Practical Sayings . . . of Mary Catharine [sic] McAuley*,

published in London by Mary Clare Moore in 1868.

Let me conclude these comments by referring to a brilliant sentence Catherine McAuley wrote on October 12-13, 1840, a sentence that in some way sums up her whole biography, her whole courage and commitment in the mission of Mercy. She had just returned from a long and fatiguing canal and coach trip to Galway and then on to Limerick. She had rushed back to Dublin, over 125 miles from Limerick, again by rattling coaches, at six miles an hour, in order to put on the boat to London two sisters she was asked to loan to the Bermondsey community. The next day she wrote: "Thank God I am at rest again, and now I think the name of another foundation would make me sick—but they say I would get up again." And "get up again" she did! For the sake of all that the mission of God's mercy asked of her in the last year of her life.

May reading *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley*, and some inspiration or grace or conversation God may give us through it, help each of us to "get up again" for wholehearted engagement in the mission of mercifulness in our world where we, at least, are not dependent, as Catherine was, on rickety coach travel or cold, slow canal boats.



A Mosaic of Catherine

Marilyn King, R.S.M.

Some time ago I lived with a Sister who was hopeless as a cook. She could never imagine how all the ingredients in a recipe could be combined to make something to eat. The skill of a good cook is something like the skill of an artist who creates a mosaic out of thousands of seemingly unrelated pieces of stone.

These two images of creating something new from many pieces came to me as I read Mary Sullivan's new book, *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012). During the early years of my 55 as a Sister of Mercy I was introduced to Catherine through anecdotes about her, sayings of hers, "leaves" recounting her life, letters written to her Sisters. With the Vatican II call to the renewal of religious life by "a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community" (Perfectae Caritatis, §. 2) a more familiar picture of Catherine emerged for me. In fact, it wasn't until more recent years that I heard us speak of her not as "Mother McAuley" but simply as "Catherine." This movement from pieces of to a whole story, from the formal to the familiar, is somewhat similar to the differences in earlier artistic representations of her sitting sedately at a desk in full habit to the watercolor portrayal of her as a reddish-blond woman that appears on the cover of Sullivan's book. The transition from ingredients to a meal or a collection of tesserae to a mosaic is how I saw Sullivan's endeavor to tell the story of the person, Catherine McAuley.

In the preface to her book, Sullivan prepares her readers for the untiring effort she makes throughout the work "to question assumptions and received information; to acknowledge areas where the data are not clear or available, and may never be; to avoid a deliberately hagiographical style; and to rely,

in general, on primary sources" (p. xi). The author's emendation of incorrect anecdotes about Catherine passed on in our "oral tradition" may at first be jarring. For example, she did not say "My legacy to the Institute is charity"; nor did she ask that the Sisters have a "comfortable cup of tea" but a "good cup of tea" after she was gone. These examples of exactness uncovered through Sullivan's careful research, though at first jarring, continually assured me that what I read is as close as anyone could come to what really happened.

The Context

Mary Sullivan graphically places Catherine in the historical, cultural, and economic context of 19th century Ireland. She describes her family influences and experiences as retrieved from written comments by Catherine's relatives, friends, and Sisters in community. Her meticulous research into newspapers of the time, obituaries, legal documents, as well as previously written books about Catherine—all of which are critiqued and often corrected or questioned for their accuracy—is almost dizzying. But this painstaking work assures the reader of the authenticity of the life that is being portrayed, the mosaic that is being created.

The first four chapters recount from the somewhat sparse resources about the life of Catherine before the establishment of the House of Mercy on Baggott Street. Like the "hidden years" of Jesus' life, little is known about what went on in Catherine's life during those 51 years. Sullivan, without filling in the gaps with suppositions or legends, gives the reader a feel for the difficulties Catherine faced from the loss of her beloved father at a very young age; the inevitable insecurity of moving from home to home after her father's death; the prejudice against Catholics in her

extended family and friends; the responsibilities assumed with care of nieces and nephews. How interesting it would be to be able trace her growth in the spiritual life during these many years. What happened in her early life to make her joyful amid sorrows, trusting in the face of disappointments, playful during times of stress? The sparse details leave much to the imagination—a move that Sullivan does not take.

Religious Life—Unplanned?

As the story of Catherine moves forward in chapter 5 to her founding of the Baggott Street House of Mercy, the story tells of her transition from being wealthy single woman to becoming the foundress of a religious community. It is this evolution that most fascinates me. How did a woman who lived in a situation where her Catholicism was apparently somewhat “underground” in the Callaghan’s Protestant household within five years live in such a way that she was recognized as a Catholic nun? It seemed that what she knew about religious life was from a view distorted by the dominant Protestant prejudice of the mid-19th century Ireland. Further, it is part of the Mercy “tradition” that assumes that Catherine did not even want to form a religious community (cf. pp. 90ff.).

Yet, the book recounts how in 1829, three years after the death of her benefactors, she, with one or two companions at Baggott Street, rose at 4 AM to pray the Psalter of Jesus and did spiritual reading, copying passages from the reading that might be used for those they would visit that day (p. 82). By 1836, before any specific Rule was approved by Rome, the then community of nine was even criticized by some clergy and lay Catholics for acting like nuns, wearing black dresses, living simply, praying communally in the morning and evening, and going to Mass together (p.

185). But, neither did Catherine seem to complain about being put into the category of a religious woman. Perhaps because these practices seemed to develop from within, rather than being taken on because of some external mandate, the formation of the “Religious called Sisters of Mercy,” was not contrary to the intention of Catherine, but even more authentic.

Astounding Works

Very likely, Catherine did not see her fledgling community as a religious foundation because the prevailing structure of religious life at the time was monastic. True, Catherine’s heart was “centered in God” as she once wrote, but her passion was for those in need, at first in her Dublin and then beyond. Baggott Street was for poor girls and women who had no opportunity for education or employment or even a home. As the cholera epidemic exploded in 1832 her Sisters moved outwards into astounding ministry. Ten of them assisted in taking care of hundreds of sick, ran a shelter for dozens of homeless women, taught hundreds of poor girls each day and cared for several orphans—all at the same time. The category of “ministerial religious life” (à la Sandra Schneiders, IHM) was just beginning to emerge, so it is not surprising that the combination of prayer and ministry in a consecrated life was “out of the box.”

The rapid growth of Mercy foundations and ministerial involvements in Ireland and England during the ten years after the opening of Baggott Street can’t but make the reader wonder if this energy could ever be replicated. After less than 10 years since the founding of the community there were 142 Sisters of Mercy (not counting the 17 who had died) and 14 houses of Mercy. These years were not without struggles with some domineering clergy and with numerous deaths, especially of

young Sisters. But the community grew rapidly. Is it that Catherine answered the

needs of people that were not being tended to in her day? Is the question for us "What unanswered needs today are calling for a gospel response?" Is that what will make us grow again?

Humor and Heartache

Two aspects of Catherine's personality are in evidence throughout the biography: her sense of humor and her positive response to the many hardships she encountered in her family and community. Sullivan sums these up on page 247:

Though her public life, to an increasing extent, radiated cheerfulness, generosity, gratitude, playfulness, affection, and self-expending mercifulness, inwardly an elegiac residue of constantly renewed grief due to the frequent loss or death of those she loved, was ever present, managed but never quite dissolved.

Catherine's letters and humorous poems, plentifully cited, reveal a person full of love, kindness, and playfulness. She met disappointments and difficulties with solid trust in the providence of God and the redemptive power of the cross. The book

candidly recounts her conflicts with builders she with whom she had to negotiate and with some clergy who assumed unwarranted authority over the community. And yet Sullivan observes that her humility did not obviate speaking the truth to those from whom she suffered unjust behavior. "Humility for her . . . could not be a matter of always deferring to the judgment of others" especially when the good of others was involved (p. 215).

From Stones to the Mosaic

There are a few portions of this biography that venture from its being a documentary into subjective analysis. For example, Chapter 10, "Beliefs and Motivations," sifts through Catherine's letters, the Rule with its emendations and insertions, the prayer books and spiritual books she used, resulting in a more theological analysis of seven elements of her Christian faith and motivations for her work. The end of Chapter 13 is likewise a study of the connection between humility and charity in Catherine's practical spirituality. But, for the most part, the story of Catherine McAuley is told objectively through carefully crafted pieces of information put together to reveal a stunning mosaic of this woman.

As I came near the end of *The Path of Mercy* I found myself wishing for a sequel that would imaginatively fill in the undocumented pieces of Catherine's life and transform her image from one made of many carefully-placed stones to more of a 3-dimensional representation. And then I realized there is such a living image of her—US, the daughters of Catherine!



What's Theology Got To Do With It: Religious Life in Crisis?

Judith Schaefer, O.P.

Naming the Moment

Religious life is in crisis. The crisis, however, is not about dwindling membership or about the scores of women and men who left religious life during the past forty years. That story has been more than adequately addressed.¹ Nor is it, as some conjecture, about a lack of faithfulness or integrity, rather the crisis at the heart of apostolic religious life in the twenty-first century is theological. What does theology have to do with it? What can theology offer that would support the way apostolic religious have been living their vows for the past forty years? Women religious have struggled hard to find ways to move forward authentically while shaping a common life that meets the needs of the times and, more importantly, remains faithful to the Gospel. And they have done this task, primarily, alone. The church has offered little theological direction that takes seriously the changes, realities, and challenges of the recent decades. A review of the documents of Vatican II and the renewal documents promulgated afterwards reveals a general vision for religious life - a way of life that would be more rooted in the charism of a founder and more engaged with the "joys and hopes" of the modern world, but the vision provides no corresponding theology that can support the changes and adaptations that the Council requested.

Theology is inherently about words; about words, images, and ideas that connect life to faith. Religious persons need their lives and actions grounded in their faith or their actions and choices become empty. When women religious are unable to connect the way they live and the choices they make to what they believe about God, they are in crisis. Words do

matter. Without a theological understanding that grounds life, words and actions chosen under the vows are in danger of becoming meaningless or obsolete. What could be more important, then, than finding accurate and meaningful theological language to ground this treasured heritage -- the words that shape and form our life together?

**The crisis at the heart of
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What does theology
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In her sociological survey of religious life in the twentieth century, Patricia Wittberg suggests that after congregations withdrew from their apostolic ministries and their sponsored institutions (for a variety of social and ecclesial reasons), a compelling theology for apostolic religious life no longer existed.² Instead, a spirituality of individual, one-on-one ministry evolved. Individuals have been left to forge their own spirituality in order to link their work and their religious vocation. If her analysis is correct, no wonder women religious feel adrift.

There are theological models and concepts available that could ground the current experience of religious life and offer women religious a sense of meaning and direction. Many of these theological concepts have co-existed for decades with the more dominant Christological and hierarchical theology of the nineteenth and twentieth century. It has been difficult, however, for these minority ideas and images to emerge.

One such concept that was reintroduced in 1985 by the Synod of Bishops is the model of "communion" as a way to describe the nature of the church and the relationship of the universal church to particular churches. "Communion" as an ecclesiological model is rooted in a trinitarian understanding of God and of God's ultimate relationship with all reality as the "Divine Communion." This model of communion theology sees the unity of the Divine Persons and the particularity of each as intrinsically unified. "Communion" inherently seeks to hold in unity both that which is common and that which distinguishes.

Defining Communion Theology

"Communion" is certainly not a new concept. The New Testament is replete with images of and calls to *koinonia*/communion or *communio*. The Greek root for communion, "*koinonia*," means to be in relationship with another in a way that is essentially unified without any diminishment of the particularity of the other. With this definition in mind, *koinonia*/communion is an appropriate concept to use to describe the interpersonal dynamics operative in the Trinity. No matter what words have been used across the centuries to describe the mystery of the Trinity, each articulation has attempted to name and describe the divine oneness of God made manifest through the unique action and being of each Person in the Trinity.

Communion theology, as seen modeled in the relationships of the Divine Communion, is characterized by relationships of mutuality, equality, and inclusivity. Unity remains central but not at the expense of diminishment of diversity. Each Person of the Trinity fully participates in that reality we name "God," and each affects salvation history in a unique manner and function. Salvation history is only

fully accomplished in the oneness manifest in particularity. Communion theology's strength is that oneness and unity are actually strengthened and only *truly* actualized when diversity and particularity are allowed to flourish.

As communion theology has been unfolding during the past twenty-five years, two distinct interpretations have emerged. One interpretation places primacy on unity, and the other interpretation gives priority to the relationship of diversity within unity. These two positions can be seen in a 1992 public exchange between then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Walter Cardinal Kasper. Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, sees the universal church as holding priority over the local church; in fact, he understands it to have an ontological and temporal priority. The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council's documents. *Koinonia*-communion, founded on Sacred Scripture, has been held in great honor in the early church and in the Eastern churches to this day. . . . The ecclesiology of communion is also the foundation for order in the church, and especially for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the church. . . . In its essential mystery, it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular church.³

For Kasper, "the universal church is not ontologically and temporally prior to the local church, but the mystery of the church is such that the universal church and local churches exist simultaneously."⁴ For Kasper the universal exists because of the originating particularity of the local church, with the local church contributing through its diversity to the unity found in the universal church.

The two co-existing interpretations of the one ecclesiology of communion are both rooted in a Trinitarian-based theology

that agrees that communion is the central image for the church and that the Church should model the activity of the Trinity. Beyond this core agreement, there is significant divergence and considerable tension, especially when implementation addresses such issues as authority, dissent, decision making, ecumenism, and collegiality. Even though official church pronouncements name only "one ecclesiology which is Catholic,"⁵ the ongoing development of various interpretations exhibits the historical struggle to name, appropriately yet analogously, the true nature of the church.⁶ As scholars have noted, "Communion ecclesiology is still under construction."⁷

Communion Theology and the Vows

Christocentric theology, a theology centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has shaped religious life and the vows for centuries. Each of the vows, and obedience in particular, has been understood theologically from the model of Christ. As Christ was simple, chaste, and obedient, so too anyone seeking to be like Christ must follow this example. Scripture passages supporting the vows are uniformly christological: poverty as Christ lived it (Luke 9:58: "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head"); celibate love as Christ loved (John 13:34-35: "Love one another as I have loved you"); and humble obedience (Philippians 2:8: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.") This theology has motivated countless religious to generous and selfless lives that have changed the face of education and healthcare in the United States.

Communion theology begins at a different point; it begins from a more pneumatological perspective that listens for the call of God in all of reality. The vows lived in communion have as their end not only communion with the

Divine but also communion with those to whom one has promised to "be of one mind and one heart."⁸ Movement toward ultimate communion is achieved through actions and choices that are made to live in communion in the present moment in mutuality and equality with both God and others.

If the image of God is the ultimate symbol for a religious community . . . then retrieving the central notion of the divine Trinity . . . is of inspirational, prophetic, and grace-filled importance. . . Only a community of equals related in profound mutuality, only a community pouring itself out for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, corresponds to the triune symbol.⁹

Using obedience as an example, we can see how communion theology can lend support, motivation, and direction to the current way of living the vows. Starting with an understanding of obedience, *ob-audire*, as "to listen," obedience is about listening-toward-communion in ways that broaden whom and to what one listens. Dominican scholar Jean-Marie Tillard understands obedience from this broader perspective:

Religious obedience is revealed as being much larger than what is ordinarily included under the term. It is defined by its straining towards a *communion* with the divine will that is the most perfect possible It everywhere seeks the voice of God By the vow of obedience what one does is in a certain way nothing else than to raise above his life a network of antennas that permit him to find with greater ease and security the multiple calls of the Lord.¹⁰

For communion theology to be supportive of religious life, it must be concrete and practical as well as motivating and inspirational. Three

specific actions or steps illustrate its applicability: listening, discernment, and response.

1) *Listening*

To whom and to what does one listen when committed to listening-in-communion?

First, the vowed religious must listen to her own heart, spirit, and conscience and assume responsibility for developing skills and practices of healthy living, prayerful contemplation, skilled listening, and informed moral reasoning and understanding.

Second, because the vowed religious has committed the whole of her life to her religious institute, obedience-in-communion obliges members to give primary attention to the needs and goals of the community as articulated in the congregation's mission statement and constitution. The individual religious listens to the voice of the community through her participation in congregational activities, through significant mutual relationships with others within the community, and through her engagement in on-going dialogue and discernment with those in leadership within the community.

Third, as publicly vowed members of the church, religious women commit themselves to be cognizant of the teachings and directives of the universal church when making important personal decisions. Understanding the theological and ecclesial parameters related to a decision allows the religious to give serious consideration to these parameters when making decisions. In today's church, the complexity of this responsibility is particularly demanding.

Fourth, each member has a responsibility to know and fully embrace the particular charism

of her religious foundation; original charisms are a gift to the church. By taking into account the institute's charism when making personal decisions, the vowed religious continues to manifest in this moment in history these particular gifts of the Spirit to the church, and thus helps assure that the diversity of gifts called forth from the communion of the body remains vibrant and alive.

Fifth, it is imperative that the needs and hopes of the larger human community are heard and heeded. The twenty-first century has deepened our awareness of the interconnectedness of all created life and has increased our sensitivity to the implications and consequences of the decisions of one part of humanity on other parts of the human community, and even on the earth. As vowed members living in community, religious have a particular sensitivity to the consequences of one person's decisions on others' lives. This experience can broaden their understanding of the importance of listening to the voices of the human community and the earth itself when making decisions in obedience. "What the world needs now, respects now, demands now, understands now is not poverty, chastity and obedience. It is generous justice, reckless love and limitless listening."¹¹

In all of the above, the vowed religious ultimately seeks the voice of God. Belief in the interactive life of the divine communion assures us that God is present and speaking in multiple ways throughout all of life. Only when one takes the time and space to truly listen and to contemplate deeply can one authentically hear God's call of love; this type of prayerful listening makes demands on one's lifestyle, time, and choices.

2) Discernment

Whatever is heard in obedient listening must then be held to the light of discernment. As moral theologian William Spohn writes, discernment is "a graced ability to detect what is the appropriate response to the invitation of God."¹² Discernment based on obedience-in-communion differs from other types of spiritual practices of decision making because of its medium. The vow of obedience intrinsically commits women religious to one another for life. Each decision, from the particular to the universal, is made from within the horizon of the common good. Each member knows and acknowledges that her actions or inaction affect the whole. Priority is given to the greater good, but only while holding in awareness that healthy, whole, and holy individuals are the greatest asset of the community.

In the contemporary moment, a vacuum exists; few if any processes have been developed that facilitate individual discernment *within* communal discernment. Many religious communities have encouraged and fostered individual discernment, and yet, few formal structures have been developed that enable the individual to be in discernment with the larger community, except through the mediation of an elected representative. The development of such processes is imperative for an authentic living out of obedience-in-communion that respects the gifts of the Spirit working within the individual and the Spirit at work in and mediated by the needs of the community.

A process of discernment based in communion would begin with agreement on the following components: (1) an openness to and confidence in God working in both the individual and in the community, (2) a process of listening that allows for input from all those whom the decision affects, (3) deliberation on the

implications of various alternatives (pros and cons), with an agreement to not avoid conflict, and (4) a commitment by all involved to faithfully live out the agreed upon decision. Discernment and dialogue obviously require the development of specific interpersonal skills in communication, such as active listening, conflict resolution, and consensus building. The acquisition of the skills necessary for engagement in these dynamic processes is the responsibility of both the individual and the community.

3) Response

After "limitless listening" and careful discernment, obedience-in-communion calls for a response to that which has been heard and discerned. For centuries, vowed religious have excelled in responding to God's call in the needs of the world. The history of religious life shows that it is precisely at the moment of hearing a new need in the world that the Spirit speaks a fresh charism. Across the centuries of Christian discipleship, religious congregations were born out of such a charismatic response.

Responding to the Word and Spirit of God is as necessary today as in any century of created history. The dilemma for contemporary vowed religious is to determine how to make a response that is viable, visible, and effective. Diminishing numbers of members, changing ecclesial demographics, new financial realities, and pervasive religious pluralism make the manner and shape of this response more difficult to ascertain. Listening and discerning, individually and together, has never been more essential.

Only through engagement in the entire process of obedience-in-communion, that is, in listening, discerning, responding, and listening anew, can religious hope to meet the world's needs in ways that participate in the fulfillment of God's design. The process doesn't end with

one response to what has been heard, but rather each response creates a new moment that calls religious members to listen again to the new realities that emerge.

Many scholars, even religious themselves, question the necessity and validity of religious life in a postmodern culture. Joan Chittister sees this as a unique and challenging moment for responding to God's multiple calls that invite the religious to rekindle the "fire in the ashes."

It is possible that we are trying to do entirely too much alone, one by one of us, instead of as a congregation itself. . . . Religious congregations must release everywhere in society, at every level, through every individual member - wherever those members are, whatever separate things they do - the white heat of the congregation's charism on the hard, cold questions of the age in one great corporate mind and one easily seen communal heart. Otherwise, what are the charisms for in this day and age?¹³

Conclusion

Religious life is in crisis. Christocentric theology has and continues to motivate and inspire many aspects of religious life. However, new dimensions and new structures require a different theological foundation. Communion theology can provide a framework that is supportive and directional. Communion, as the end to which the vows aim, becomes the criteria against which all is held. In many ways, communion is both the means and the end for religious life. Living and choosing toward communion with God and toward those to whom we have pledged our lives enables religious to live the grace they seek.

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Communion theology does not erase the difficulties of this age. In fact, appropriating a new theology will require study, adaptation, and the development of new skills of communication, decision making, and discernment. Learning to listen, discern, and respond against the measure of communion will require all the selflessness and good will we can muster. We aren't necessarily used to living the vows together rather in many ways we have lived the vows alone together. Communion will no longer allow this practice. Rooting the vows in communion theology requires that women religious understand theologically and live out concretely, through their actions, choices, and practices, the life they desire together. Communion, then, can become the one thing that binds us to each other 'even unto death'.

1. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, "Catholic Religious Vocations: Decline and Revival," *Review of Religious Research* 42:2 (2000): 125. Since 1965, communities of U.S. women religious have declined in number by over 100,000 women, a nearly fifty percent decrease from their highest enrollment.
2. Patricia Wittberg, *From Piety to Professionalism and Back? Transformations of Organized Religious Virtuosity*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006, 5.

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- 3 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion," *Origins* 22 (25 June 1992): 108-109.
 - 4 Killian McDonnell, "Walter Kasper on the Theology and the Praxis of the Bishop's Office," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 712.
 - 5 CDF, 109.
 - 6 CDF, Introduction.
 - 7 Nicholas Healy, in a response session to Doyle's, "Communion Ecclesiology. Visions and Versions," CTS Convention, Portland, Oregon, June 1, 2001.
 - 8 Augustine of Hippo, *Rule of St. Augustine*: "The main purpose for your having come together is to live together in harmony, intent upon God in unity of mind and heart."
 - 9 Elizabeth Johnson, "Trinity. To Let the Symbol Ring Again," *Theology Today* 54 (October 1997): 311.
 - 10 Jean-Marie Tillard, *Mystery of Religious Life*. St. Louis: 1967, 88.
 - 11 Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes. A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995, 102.
 - 12 William Spohn, "The Reasoning Heart. An American Approach to Christian Discernment," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 30.
 - 13 Chittister, 168.

H. A. Reinhold and Liturgical Renewal

Julie Upton, R.S.M.

Worship in Spirit and Truth: The Life and Legacy of H. A. Reinhold (Liturgical Press, 2009) is what I call a liturgical biography. Reinhold was a leader in the American Liturgical Movement, who probably did more than any other person to prepare the Church in the United States for the changes which followed Vatican Council II. He was a prophet who saw the essential link between liturgy and social justice, and although he died in 1968 his words and ideas might even be more relevant today than they were forty years ago.

In 1967 an article by *Commonweal* associate editor John Leo entitled "The Catholic Establishment," appeared in *The Critic* (December 1966-January 1967). In the article Leo compiled a short list of influential Catholic publications and intellectuals whose "chief business ... is the shaping and publicizing of the issues that will dominate American Catholic life." Leo described them as "liberal, progressive, largely urban, suspicious of institutions, antiwar ... and concerned mainly with intramural Catholic problems." Most of the names on the list would be familiar to Catholics of that era. However Leo singled out two as having graduated from member to "establishment heroes": Dorothy Day and Rev. H. A. Reinhold.

Dorothy Day, of course, needs no introduction. Once viewed as a rebel with a cause, Day lived long enough not only to be vindicated, but to be regarded as a revered elder in our midst. Today she is even a candidate for sainthood. What tied them together was their passion for justice and their active involvement in the Liturgical Movement. Although today these might seem like strange bedfellows, in the 1940s and 1950s they were inextricably linked. Liturgical reformers like

like Fr. Reinhold believed that a renewed liturgy would result in forming more "active" Catholics, committed to deeds of justice and works of mercy. Similarly, social activists such as Dorothy Day also forged connections with the liturgical movement. Articles on liturgy became a regular feature in *The Catholic Worker* and Catholic Worker Houses were models of active participation in the liturgy.

While Reinhold was similarly heroic, his name is lost in the pages of liturgical history, although his deeds live in on our daily liturgical worship. Gathered around the table of the Lord to celebrate Eucharist today, some of us look back now almost fifty years to Vatican Council II as the beginning of a new era. In 1960 the congregation knelt behind the altar of the Lord in silence, watching the back of someone who prayed in a language that was not our own. We were pious, but practice determined that we were also silent and appeared to be passive. The liturgical revisions in the ensuing years gradually stripped away cultural accretions and affectations that had masked the Church that Jesus called us to be.

**Virgil Michel, Gerald Ellard,
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Although some critics would have us believe that the resulting changes in the liturgy that followed upon Vatican Council II were instigated by a vocal minority of religious blackguards and malcontents, among their roots we find instead the authority of the papacy. Pius X early in the twentieth century encouraged both the study of the liturgy and the restoration of its classical form, particularly in his *motu proprio Tra la sollecitudine* (1903). "Filled as we are with a most ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit flourish in every respect and be preserved by all the faithful, we deem it necessary to provide before aught else for ... the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church." In numerous other documents he continued to echo his concern for the proper celebration of the liturgy by the clergy and the active participation of the faithful. Pius XII, with the publication of the encyclical *Mediator Dei* in 1947, implicitly acknowledged that the efforts of his predecessor needed to be resumed in order to revitalize the liturgy, and to allow it once again to be the work and deed of the praying community of believers. Virgil Michel, Gerald Ellard, Godfrey Diekmann, H. A. Reinhold and others like them who studied in Germany, caught a glimpse of what the Church in America could be, enlivened by active participation in the liturgy. The least known today, but probably the most effective in that ministry, was H. A.

Reinhold - truly heroic, as John Leo observed.

Physically and psychologically ravaged by Parkinson's disease for more than a decade, Reinhold died just a year after the Leo article appeared. In the four decades before his death, Reinhold contributed 64 essays and 82 book reviews as well as several letters to *Commonweal* alone. While they reflected his broad interests in theology and culture, topics of liturgy, social justice and ecumenism pervaded most. He cultivated in his readers an understanding of the

broader patterns of liturgical practice in Europe and regularly made the connection between liturgy and justice clear. For him that connection was a mandate and through his writings *Commonweal* readers were carefully prepared for receiving the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. As is true for the work of prophets and heroes, Reinhold's essays are as relevant today as they were more than forty years ago.

Reinhold's life story reads like the best of suspense thrillers. Born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1897, he received his liturgical formation at Maria Laach Abbey at the height of its influence. Later ordained for the Diocese of Osnabruck, at the request of his bishop, Reinhold established the seaman's apostolate in Germany and quickly became an international leader in that ministry and its organization. His goal was to let the seamen pray and sing the Mass, as was already being done in Hamburg.

His seamen's institutes had chapels where the sailors had space for private prayer and could meet Christ in the Liturgy. These chapels were plain and dignified, bright and warm in colors. He encouraged others in the ministry to bring the sailors close to the altar, so that they may not fail to pray and sacrifice Mass *with* their priest. Beyond that he also set out to raise the seamen's political consciousness, having learned himself as a soldier in World War I to be suspicious of the government. For this he was eventually expelled from Germany by the Gestapo in 1935, and in a harrowing escape that haunted him all his days, he eventually managed to emigrate to the United States the following year.

As early as 1938 in the "The Cloister and Society" (*Commonweal*, May 20, 1938) Reinhold began what in hindsight can be viewed as a curriculum for liturgical renewal in the United States, not only in the pages of *Commonweal*, but over the years also in *Orate Fratres/Worship*,

Jubilee and The Living Light. In "The Cloister and Society" he opened a window for Americans onto liturgical developments in Europe, vividly describing the Catholic revival, "which first seized the intelligentsia of Germany, then spread to the young clergy, invaded parishes and organizations." That revival was actually begun by young people who sensed "a gap between their personal piety and the official worship on the altar which no one had been able to bridge." In Reinhold's words they wondered if the liturgy could become "daily bread for a good Catholic stomach" or was to remain "caviar for some esoterics."

Reinhold described the growing popularity of "liturgical weeks" in Europe, which began as far back as 1914, and by 1938 had become permanent fixtures for Catholics in Germany, Austria, France and Belgium. Two years later the first Liturgical Week in the United States was held at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago, then known more for its gangsters and "unsavory political machines." In "The Inner Forum" (*Commonweal*, November 15, 1940) Reinhold reported on this "greatest event in the history of American Catholicism." "A thousand humble layfolk, nuns, youngsters and old people, priests, monks, abbots and a sprinkling of several degrees of purple sat for more than three days, six hours each day ... reminding us of the crowds of Galilee." Never, he wrote, was the name of Christ and the Church "pronounced with more love, concern and sincerity." "The American church," he concluded, "has found herself in Christ and she is not what her enemies say, a clerical racket, but a love, a deep concern and a redemptive joy of her humble people."

From 1940 until 1965, the last year he was able to attend, Reinhold regularly reported in the pages of *Commonweal* on the annual Liturgical Weeks held in various cities across the United States.

When I was growing up in the 1950s everyone carried a Sunday Missal to weekly Mass, and those who attended Mass during the week generally had a daily Missal. It was startling for me to learn that this was not always so. Only in 1897 were the laity permitted to have copies of the Mass texts in their own language. Prior to that time all those who would print, read, or even possess vernacular missals were threatened with excommunication. It was not until the late 1930s that missals began to be published in the United States.

Reinhold's principal concern was that because people had become religiously inarticulate, they failed to see the connection between liturgy and justice. He never minced words, which endeared him to some, but drew down the ire of others.

This neuralgic point made him many enemies and caused him great suffering. Like any honorable prophet, however, he pressed on. By continuing to stir these waters, he was dismissed as a columnist both by a diocesan newspaper and a leading liturgical journal. *Commonweal*, however, continued to publish his articles and book reviews.

In many articles Reinhold kept asking, "Where is the soul-stirring *actio*?" Yes, soul-stirring *actio* was Reinhold's enduring concern. He firmly believed that *actio* would invade the consciousness of those who were truly liturgical, and for them liturgy and life, worship and justice, would become one, manifesting true congruence. The true test for liturgical spirit would be for those who stand up for it at the same time to serve the poor in houses of hospitality, to help organize parish cooperatives, to lead in labor movements, etc.

Mere physical presence at Mass alone, even accompanied with reception of Holy Communion, Reinhold taught, "would not automatically integrate Christ into us." Rather,

He taught that "we must leave our own little world of preferences, emotions, likes and dislikes" and surrender them at Mass, "the *tremendum mysterium*." With every fiber of our being, not only emotion, not only reason, not only will, but with our whole being we have to throw ourselves into His arms and expose our souls to the influx of His power." Only if we do this, "if we open our ears to His message of joy, if we rise above ourselves and merge with Him in our surrender to the Father in the act of consecration, if we really con-celebrate, participate in the sacrifice-banquet and let the center of his life be the center of our own person: then we will function in the Body that alone can save the world" (*The Wanderer*, June 19, 1941).

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Reinhold firmly believed that this would eventually be achieved only if liturgy was celebrated in the vernacular. He made one of his most cogent arguments in "About English in Our Liturgy" (*Commonweal*, March 16, 1945), acknowledging it to be a "red hot issue ... and the fact that it is so seldom discussed in public shows its delicacy." He went on to explain that "the English must be the best available on the level of a T. S. Eliot or W. H. Auden. Its savor must be akin to Winston Churchill's power of formulation and must have, on a religious plain, the earthiness and force which he shows in his political language."

In "Threshold or Interior" (*Commonweal*, August 26, 1949) Reinhold asserted that "a return to the language of the people is a basic step towards a living liturgy." Not content to "let worshipers down at the threshold of the mystery," Reinhold wanted to lead people to the center where "the celebrating throng ... is singing psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles ... united as one body in that banquet." In that era these attempts took the shape of dialogue Mass, or Mass sung by the congregation or the "Roman way of facing the people from behind the sacrificial banquet table."

Scandalous ideas to some, glimpses into the future for others, Reinhold continued along this path opening the "Future of the Liturgy" (*Commonweal*, November 6, 1953) in a church where few could imagine the liturgy's possibility or potential. "Translation of the texts which the people hear, the pruning of dead rites, the abolition of features that are the outcome of a 'clericalizing' tendency of the early Middle Ages" were some of the areas of reform he mentioned. Reporting on the third international gathering of liturgical scholars in Lugano, Switzerland, Reinhold noted that the universal goal of the Liturgical Movement was "a reform that recognizes that Christians must live and experience their brotherhood, their oneness in Christ, their immediacy to God" which would enable them to worship in spirit and truth.

"The coming generations will undoubtedly forget what a hard struggle, what endless patience, and what an amount of learning were required to change even the smallest minutiae involved in reconstruction," Reinhold wrote in his last *Commonweal* essay, "No Time to Stop" (*Commonweal*, August 20, 1965). We are that generation. When Reinhold penned those words, the reforms recommended by the Second Vatican Council were still being

developed: the Eucharistic prayer was still in Latin; the lectionary and breviary as we know it today had not yet been developed; and none the others sacraments had yet been revised. Still Reinhold saw that the most important work was to deepen our understanding of liturgy. "They cannot ask us to stop carrying out the work of the Council. We are late, dangerously late. There is no time for ritual performance; we must take our place in the vanguard of true worship."

Within 18 months Reinhold was dead from the ravages of Parkinson's disease. In "H.A.R. - Death of a Friend" (*Commonweal*, March 8, 1968), Emeric Lawrence wrote, "During the years when apostles of the liturgy limited their ambition to promoting the dialogue Mass ... H.A.R. presumed to say in writing that all attempts at encouraging participation were piddling so long as Latin remained an obstacle between God's word and man's response to it. He hoped for and demanded change when no one else dared hope."

That issue of *Commonweal* also included excerpts from the homily given by William Clancy at Reinhold's funeral. "We come here today in faith, in hope, and in love to celebrate the death of a Christian who was our friend, our brother, and our dear father and teacher in God ... many of us come also to pay a debt - the greatest of all debts, the greatest of all debts, the debt of faith itself. Because Hans Ansgar Reinhold taught us (some of us when we were very young, some of us when we were older) to see in a way we had not seen before, in a way we had not suspected was possible before we read him or knew him. He taught us to see the very things we celebrate today - the mystery and the joy of the church, that is, the mystery and the joy of the resurrection and the glory of Christ Jesus.

"Hans Reinhold suffered over the plight of migrant workers. He suffered for the Jews. He suffered for the refugees. And this was not a mere intellectual suffering. He involved himself always in causes which gave some practical

expression to his concerns. He knew that Jesus Christ must be sought out and served in his brothers, in his lonely and suffering brothers, throughout all human history."

Here we stand at an important moment in the Church's history having recently received a new translation of the Roman Missal that will shape our worship probably for the next few decades. It is the perfect opportunity to return to basics, to focus on the essential meaning of worship and finally make the link between liturgy and justice that Dorothy Day, Virgil Michel, H. A. Reinhold and many others saw as so necessary for the Church to live. It is no longer helpful to quibble over words, but rather to let the words shape us and send us to heal the wounds in the broken body of Christ suffering in the world today - on the streets right outside the church door and in developing countries around the world. They are the Body of Christ and we are their servants by our baptism.

That issue of *Commonweal* also included excerpts from the homily given by William Clancy at Reinhold's funeral.

**"We come here today in faith,
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and teacher in God.
... many of us come also to
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the debt of faith itself.**

There are resources available to us for this implementation that even Reinhold could not dream, utilizing the latest technology

to reach the widest circle of the faithful. The United States Catholic Conference has a bilingual Roman Missal website

[<http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/>] which in itself is a library of resources. The International Commission on English in the Liturgy commissioned an interactive DVD [<http://www.becomeonebodyonespiritinchrist.org>] which serves as a catechetical and liturgical

resource for the entire Catholic community. This is the task of our times—an opportunity to deepen our experience of worship, to effect the “inner reform” Reinhold saw as the essential next step, by making clear the essential link between liturgy and justice. These are the stories we should be sharing in the days ahead. Let’s get to work!



The Alienation Effect

From Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*, p. 101:

And later, when I began to write down the events of my childhood in a language foreign to their happening, it was a revelation. English could protect me; an alphabet without memory.

Befuddled, bruised, brow-beaten
Bereft of my childhood,
Rootless, rudderless,
I came to these shores,
Not daring
To hope, to dream.

Better forget that mother tongue
That had lashed out
At us in raw curses.
Banish it, let it go.
Then, with utmost care
Make that adoptive language
My own, to formulate,
To shape anew
Lament for home,
For friends,
For cozy lullabies
Left behind.

To find a new voice,
An English voice,
Proof against sharp arrows
From that distant world
Of home.
Could English
Indeed be my protecting shield
Against assaults from
What had been home?

I flung myself
Into new speech,
New writing,
New reading.

In newness,
In strangeness found
A tingling welcome
An opening
Barely perceptive,
A ringing, singing
Forming into strange words
My lonely thoughts,
My memories
Bitter as *maror*,
Sweet as honey,
My longing, sharp as icicles
And just as chill.

I was a stranger
In a strange land
And found my voice
In a language not my own.
To my amazement
To my surprise and delight.
I spoke, and found my tongue
In exile.

Susanne M. Batzdorff

Art-Journaling and the Circle of Mercy

Marianne Hieb, R.S.M.

... a circle is a line connecting infinite points that are equidistant from a center...

In 2006, I was in Dublin, sitting in the same room where Clare Augustine Moore painted her glorious illuminations, and imagining her at work under the watchful eye of our foundress. As part of the meditation I was facilitating, I held a lump of clay in my hands, forming it in silence, and watching as the shape shifted.

The rest of the workshop group had gone on break. Two of us remained in the space, Oonagh Campbell, from County Down and me. Oonagh, also working quietly with the clay, was a participant in "Write the Vision Down: an Art-Journaling Retreat" I was presenting at Mercy International Centre.

This past year, Oonagh was guest staff for Lourdes Wellness Center's retreat: *Seeking the Advent Face of the Holy in Assisi*. While she facilitated *Italy Days of Praise for Winter's Whisperings*, I presented *Art-Journaling as a Spiritual Practice*.

My ministry at Lourdes Wellness Center, where I serve as Director of Wellness Spirituality, has been the container for the design and development of these retreat and art-journaling processes. For such events, I use my book *Inner Journeying through Art-Journaling* as a resource.

Journaling Practice

There are many approaches to the practice of journaling, and many benefits attributed to journaling as an activity. From an effective stress reducer to a tool for spiritual biography, journaling spans the literature in breadth, scope, purpose, and variety. One can find it touted equally as effective for weight reduction as for life discernment. Journaling practice has a great potential to be a priceless container for gratitude. It can become a personal tool for an individual to hold out the gifts of a lifetime and gaze at them, noticing places of movement, illumination and grace.

The Art-Journaling Approach

My particular approach to journaling is holistic, and includes the combination of non-verbal and verbal aspects. In my retreats and workshops, I urge participants to trust their inner wisdom, and their belief in the God who desires to reveal.

In art-journaling prayer, we begin with a theme or question, respond prayerfully to that question with art materials, take some time to "gaze contemplatively, non-judgmentally, receptively" and only then does the retreatant go into the verbal journaling process. Over the years, through the graced sharing of the participants I have learned how the combination of non-verbal and verbal approaches can yield profound and surprisingly swift insights.

Art-Journaling Beginnings

The properties of the tool I call Art-Journaling came about many years ago, in planning for a spirituality offering through my ministry at Lourdes. The staff came together to design a weekend retreat with a wellness spirituality theme. The retreat would be experiential, including offerings in prayer and meditation, good nutrition, exercise, and relaxation training. Since I held fast to the concept that creativity was an essential component of wellness, the staff encouraged me to include a creativity session in the format. As a result, I brought drawing paper and oil pastels, writing supplies and an outline of the meditation to the weekend experience.

Using "the gift of the present moment" as a theme, the retreatants considered the aspects of their ordinary days, used the pastels to create lines and shapes to express that experience, gazed at their visual expression, and then moved into a time of reflective writing. The meditation was followed by silence and optional sharing.

The art-journaling prayer process as I would present and facilitate it was born.

In 2006, I was in Dublin,
sitting in the same room where
Clare Augustine Moore painted
her glorious illuminations,
and imagining her at work
under the watchful eye of
our foundress.
As part of the meditation
I was facilitating,
I held a lump of clay in my hands,
forming it in silence, and watching
as the shape shifted.

Influences

In my definition, Art-Journaling shares in the disciplines of spiritual direction, design theory, fine art, art therapy, creativity, and the contemplative tradition.

Looking back at my own life adventures, I can trace the practice and therefore the book's evolution through a variety of pathways, each sharing in aspects of education, opportunity and serendipity.

Probably my first art-journaling nudging began in my high school art classes at Merion Mercy Academy with Ethel Sweeney, R.S.M. We were learning about the basic structure of visual art, and the parable nature of the elements of design began to show itself. We learned about "point" and "line," two core aspects of design theory. "A line is point put into motion." This simple definition grew into one of the ways I begin retreats. *What is the 'point' at which you find yourself as you begin this retreat? Draw the 'line' of events that brought you to this moment, this decision, this crossroad.*

Toward the end of the retreat, participants might consider: *At what 'point' are you in your discernment? "What point" in your life is God inviting you to put into motion?* People will use a

visual language to attempt to express a response on paper, sometimes just using a simple fine line colored marker. They will look at their 'point' and 'line' in a receptive way, and then do some written journaling.

Often the simplicity of such a focused question, accompanied by a visual and written response, can give insight in a situation that might otherwise be clouded by the weight of many heavy words.

Getting from there to here

As a young professed, I was assigned to teach middle school. Several years into this ministry, our discerning leadership suggested I pursue a degree in Fine Arts.

At Catholic University I was painting, sculpting and designing. I studied art history, and learned the historical progression of "space," another element of design. It is fascinating to see how the ancients depicted visual space, and to trace how the manner of representing pictorial space evolved through the eras of art history.

In design classes I continued to encounter the visual language expressed through the art elements of *point, line, shape, color, and texture*. Then, while immersed in studio art, I stumbled upon the field of art therapy, and used all my electives to accrue credit hours in that discipline.

Art Therapy as Foundational

Unexpectedly, this confluence propelled me into health care. I ministered at two Mercy inpatient psychiatric units, amassing the supervised clinical hours required for registration as an art therapist.

In those units, we were working with groups and individuals using art as a healing and expressive tool, and I was stunned by the results. As a religious in ministry at a Mercy hospital, I experienced the need for a strong spiritual component in addressing the challenges for therapist and client in a mental health setting. I asked to study spiritual direction at an inter-

-esting time in our community's ministerial history.

Spiritual Direction as Creative Process

I was formed and changed by the contemplative, ecumenical journey I began and still touch into through Shalem Institute of Spiritual Formation. I studied with the greats: Gerald May, Tilden Edwards, Rosemary Dougherty and Shaun McCarty. Simultaneously, Helen Owens, a Franciscan Sister and fellow graduate of Catholic University in Community Health, invited me to do art-journaling research at *The Bridge*, an adolescent enrichment program of Lourdes Health System in Camden. Eventually this collaboration led to a staff position at Lourdes. Through the development of the retreat and spiritual direction program there, Art-Journaling as a spiritual practice and a tool for spiritual direction has grown and developed.

Points along the way

I am at a point in my life where looking back is key. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of the graced connections that moved me from one place to another in the journey. I know that all of my training in seeing has led me to this point ... seeing fine art, learning history of art, being trained in diagnostic art therapy, experiencing icon space in prayer and in the spiritual direction ministry, being formed in contemplative gazing. I studied with Frederick Franck, author of the classic *Zen of Seeing*. I waited overnight for the opening of a clay pit fire with MC Richards, author of *Pottery Poetry and the Person*. I worked in *Shining Clay* with Paulus Behrenson, and drew Mandalas in a workshop facilitated by Judith Cornell.

In a week when New York City was shut down by snow in 1997, I *Painted from the Source* with Aviva Gold. Beginning with a formal art course *Spirit Finding Form* led by DS, I have spent many hours staring at the shimmering vista from hill

town of Assisi and have been changed irreparably by that encounter.

Spiritual Direction, Art Journaling and Wellness Spirituality

By the time I was ready to put my retreat and workshop experience into published form, I was using a two-part meditation entitled the Life Elements/Life Dynamics Assessment. It is often the key exercise used to introduce art-journaling to a new retreat or workshop group. This is described in more detail in the Chapters One and Two of *Inner Journeying* but here is a glimpse of the process.

I was formed and changed
by the contemplative,
ecumenical journey
I began and still touch
into through Shalem Institute
of Spiritual Formation.

Life Elements /Life Dynamics Meditation Assessment

Start with the definition: Art-Journaling® is the use of simple art materials, the language of design, gazing, writing, and noticing.

In this two-part meditation, the journaler considers a theme and begins by responding to that theme using art materials. I tend to encourage the use of more abstract work rather than representational art, to avoid the natural tendency to be critical or judgmental when something we draw doesn't look the way we want it to look.

I suggest using oil pastels and drawing paper as the "simple art materials," and a journal in which to record any verbal reflections.

The instructions might sound like this. To begin, set aside some open time and space. Do whatever helps you to settle, quiet, and center.

In the presence of the Holy, ask to be led. Now consider this question prayerfully. What are all

of the elements that make up my life as it is today? Working with the first theme, the journaler uses art materials to respond in the language of design (line, shape, space, mark, point, color, texture).

Next she or he gazes. The book goes into more detail, but gazing is a contemplative, receptive, non judgmental looking, not always easy when our tendency might be to cast a critical eye on our creative manifestations.

Insights from the drawing and gazing are then clarified in the writing process that follows. The participant is encouraged to jot down anything that might express and further the non verbal and contemplative prayer.

In the same way that the written journaling serves to focus, the attitude of noticing helps one to stay open to any other insights that might occur later.

Part Two, the Life Dynamics Meditation, moves through the same process. Begin with a question: *Through what elements of my life am I being invited toward change or growth or healing?*

The journaler repeats the same steps: Consider the theme, Draw, Gaze, Write and Notice. After completion, one is encouraged to take the opportunity to spend time with the second drawing on its own, but later, take some time to look at both drawings together. Often, other insights arise from noticing any striking similarities and differences between the two meditations.

I have learned through the generous sharing of the participants how effectively this combination of elements facilitates inspiration. The result is characteristically simple and profound.

Themes and topics

In one chapter of the book, I focus on several themes for which I think art-journaling can be especially helpful: discernment, resistance, grief, loss and illumination. There are sections of the book that tells the reader a bit more about the principles and elements of design, and also mention the use of art-

journaling as a tool in spiritual direction. This topic is covered in a particular way in several articles available through *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*.

Art Journalers and Creative Seekers

Over the years, the ministry of art-journaling has put me in direct contact with the stunning beauty of some of our members. Sarita Vasquez from Belize spent some of her sabbatical time with an art-journaling component. So did Gaye Lennon from Australia, and several of our Sisters from South America, Ireland, the UK and the States. In different retreat centers, when working with large groups or with individuals, the privileged glimpses I receive in graced encounters drive me deeply into awe and gratitude. The veil is lifted, and for a moment a glimpse of the Holy shimmers forth...

**What are all
of the elements
that make up my life
as it is today?**

Furthering the practice

You will not find these stories in *Inner Journeying through Art -Journaling*. You will find a systematic invitation to a practice that will help focus your expression, and perhaps open a way into a place of revelation.

I tell people art-journaling is good for visual artists because it forces them to pin down their insights with words. It is good for the high verbal learner, because it frees the eloquent energy of the Image. It invites our contemplative, non-judgmental gaze, and urges us to stay in the process, waiting for the deeper revelation, trusting that God desires to reveal, and waiting at the edge of our knowing for that revelation to arrive.

Some hopes and nudgings

Hopefully, there may be some suggestions to take away from this article; things that you can

use immediately. My best advice: Try them for yourself.

There is one caution I always pose to any group I work with. For people in ministry and relationship, there is a temptation to which we are uniquely susceptible. Our minds imagine how helpful this approach would be for (her/him/them). We tend to want to give it, perhaps even before appropriating the reality of its efficacy into our own experience.

Do it for yourself. I dedicate several paragraphs to that declarative in Chapter Six. It is important that anyone offering such an approach be steeped in the personal experience. We all have encountered the power of the Image and the Word. This is not just about some useful exercises; it presents an expressive, sometimes unconscious and revelatory tool. Someone trained in art therapy recognizes aspects of a diagnostic visual language and knows when to back away instead of encouraging, and when to gently invite forward. Using visual imagery and personal reflection is powerful, and should be acknowledged as such.

Preparation and experience

Much resistance to creative processes used in a casual way at corporate and communal gatherings can merely be the resistance of a healthy intuition that senses danger. I am cautious when someone utilizes any creative expressive tool lightly. When anyone asks me about professional preparation for an art-journaling practice, I respond with this range. One should be a student of contemplative and creative seeing. Having an art therapy background primes one to proceed judiciously, protecting the individual or the group if deeper exploration at that moment or in that setting might prove risky. Studying studio art, design theory and art history helps one to encounter the elements and principles of design with respect and delight. Formation through spiritual

direction reminds one to "lean back." All of this is a growing arsenal in working in the field of art-journaling as it is presented in my retreats, workshops and writings.

Action-Contemplation

The practice of art-journaling has the potential to speak (verbally and non verbally) to some core aspects of our Mercy charism. One of the most structural parallels is the manifestation of a longing we harbor: to hold in oneness the call to contemplation and action.

In our gatherings and in our literature, we return again and again to this familiar yet challenging dynamic in the living out of Mercy.

In art-journaling, you move intrinsically through the dynamic of action-contemplation. You begin with a contemplative invitation, then actively seek an image, then step back into contemplative gazing, then move outward to write down the insights, then pause again to notice. Finally, you move outward again, to embrace or actualize any insight or resolve that emerged from the prayerful process.

Art-journaling can be a practice that engages us at the point of our most authentic doing, how we manifest in Mercy, and how we move inward to a depth of silent being, a place of wisdom both shared and solitary, given and received.

**The practice of art-journaling
has the potential to speak
(verbally and non verbally)
to some core aspects of our
Mercy charism.**

**One of the most structural
parallels is the manifestation
of a longing
we harbor: to hold in oneness
the call to contemplation
and action.**

The spirit of imagery

We need to consider Catherine's experience of the compass. *"We should be as the compass that goes round its circle without stirring from its center..."* I wonder at her diligence with this, a designer's tool. We can see her, keeping the instrument steady, placing it in at a precise point, holding it to the center as the extended arm describes a perfect circle, every point of the circumference equidistant to the center.

My imagery of Catherine shifts. I see her in darkness, the curtain billowing in the evening of her sorrow, in darkness before the light. *"See how quietly the great God does his mighty works. Darkness is spread over us and light breaks in again, and there is no noise of drawing curtains or closing shutters."*

We are called to the creativity that is essential to Mercy within, and Mercy in the world. Art-Journaling as a spiritual practice is an active prayer that can support the range of this seeking.

God's Providential Mercy

Perhaps Art-Journaling could invite you to look forward, in discernment prayer. Perhaps it invites you to look back, to notice the providential work of a creative God who moves you from point to point through darkness and in light,

creating your life-line, and bringing you to a deeper awareness of your unique graced history. How might you respond to this invitation? Pose a theme or question for your personal journaling. Respond to that question prayerfully, using the art materials and color, line, space, shape, and texture. Gaze receptively. Write down whatever helps you to clarify your expression. We each are writing our book of Mercy, and what a joy it would be if we could invite each other to that creative adventure.

Points of Mercy

Be like the compass, Catherine says. We mark the center, and simultaneously connect all of the dots that are equidistant from that center to form the song of our future, the core and circumference of Mercy.

When grace breaks through, we can more easily apprehend the line that connects each of us to each other and to the Center. *A circle is a line connecting infinite points that are equidistant from a center.* We are each a point in the Circle of Mercy, called to hope in a timeless Center.



ALSO BORN OF THE FIRE

Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.

My favorites in college were English Literature classes. I remember waking up on a Wednesday morning with a smile thinking, "It's Wednesday, I get to go to Shakespeare today." However, I stuck with my chemistry major as encouraged by my high school science teacher. What could you do with English except become a teacher? I look back now after thirty years of teaching chemistry with gratitude to a sister who kindly brought me trays when I was sick one time with the flu. It didn't occur to her that I needed books to keep me occupied, so I resorted to writing poetry. My first poem was entitled "Late for the Sunset." I was living on the fourth floor of a convent overlooking the Pacific Ocean and a frequent joyful experience was watching the evening sun sink into the ocean with myriad, beautiful cloud formations.

LATE FOR THE SUNSET

Must you take the footlights
when you leave the stage?
We're left with nothing
but the remnant red veil
of the great hot-head
that just bowed out.

How I'd love to reach out
and grab you by the nape
and yank you back
to repeat the exit
and delay the Chinese entrance
so you'll know what it's like to be late!

Later, after eight years in administration, I had the opportunity of a sabbatical. I enrolled in the Creative Writing Program at San Francisco State University where I learned the craft of poetry from experts - Kathleen Fraser, Jack Marshall, Frances Mayes and William Dickey to name a few. In the years that followed I wrote poems in notebooks, on the backs of

envelopes, in retreat journals and on scraps of paper. The number of poems grew to a size where I had more than ample choices to publish my book,

"Also Born of the Fire." The task of choosing and organizing led me to find that many poems clustered around six themes - nature, the sun, questions, patriotism, feminism and religion. In a journal where I had recorded favorite sayings from poets, I found six that matched these categories and used them to introduce each section. The title of the book *"Also Born of the Fire"* was prompted by T.S. Eliot's "the fire and the rose are one." My consciousness was evolving to recognize that my dualistic thinking was slowly being transformed into seeing that everything dates back to the original fire ball.

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning
God preceded beginning

In the beginning - fire
Before the beginning - nothing

The sight of fire burning nothing
Raises the great prayer - Aha

**My favorites in college were
English Literature classes.
I remember waking up on a
Wednesday morning with a smile
thinking "It's Wednesday, I get to
go to Shakespeare today."**

I have been co-directing for many years a monthly workshop entitled Conscious Evolution. It was inspired by a weekend workshop given by Barbara Marx Hubbard, author of a book by that name. For me it has been a journey of awakening to realities that

the world community is facing in terms of sustainability. For eons we had been more or less unconsciously involved in the evolution of consciousness. But time has brought the human community to the realization that the present environmental crisis has unknowingly been engineered by human behavior. We are now in the driver's seat and the future of life on earth depends on some drastic changes in human consciousness. It is time to admit that we cannot go on living as we have been, without destroying our life support.

ANATOMY OF A DRIVER

"Conscious evolution"
is a transitive verb

There is an object
to focus upon
a place to aim toward

So instead of unraveling EGO
We are knitting her threads
into a conscious oneness

It does no good
being in the driver's seat
unless you have a hand
for the wheel and a foot
for the brake

In April of 2010 I took the facilitator training for a program called "Awakening the Dreamer" which came about from a call by indigenous people in Ecuador to their neighbors of the north. This tribe who live in a beautiful rain forest area saw their land being destroyed by foreigners who were cutting down trees and digging oil wells for their own capital gain without regard for the natives of the land. An organization called The Pachamama Alliance was formed by the Achuar people who reached out to form a partnership with the very people who were

actually destroying their land. Lynne Twist, author of "The Soul of Money" and her husband Bill are co-founders of the Pachamama Alliance. The Awakening the Dreamer program at this point has been translated into 13 languages, has 3500 volunteer facilitators and has spread to 60 countries around the world. Its stated purpose is to form an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just human presence on this planet.

AWAKENING

I'm waking up to find
I'm on the Titanic
I didn't/wouldn't listen
to all the warnings

Some say
it didn't have to happen
if they had closed the hatches
the ship was "unsinkable"

Now what to do
this unwanted awareness
of menacing water
beyond the flimsy hatches

A key insight in the Awakening the Dreamer symposium is that we (all of creation) are not separate. In order to save this planet for future generations we are called to participate in what David Korten calls the "Great Turning" from Empire to Earth Community. It occurred to me that our Transforming Mercy/Mercy Transforming program is right in line with this thinking. Our first step involves a change in our current reality as a religious community to meet the demands our earth population is facing. Then we will be able to influence the massive change that will move toward a unified earth community that is sustainable.

TRANSFORMING MERCY

Let's stop
feeding the poor
without pondering
why they're hungry

Let's stop
dressing the naked
who have no closets
to hang their clothes in

Let's stop
teaching the children
how to get
the best paying jobs

Let's stop
healing methods
that ignore
the source of illness

Let's stop being women
who permit
men to always
have it their way

Let's become
cosmic members
of a Divine Family
on a perpetual journey

Let's learn
to do it now
even if it might be
too late

Recent advances in technology bring the advantage of instantaneous global news with the result that we can no longer think of ourselves as unconnected to the rest of the world. Consequently themes for poetry have expanded greatly. Staying alert opens the poet to surprising and numerous inspirations and ideas for content. Oftentimes a strong

emotional reaction from a news item will lead to a poem. An example of one such word was "drones". This poem was accepted for publication in *America* magazine (1/4/2010).

DRONES

The dictionary names drones
"male bees making no honey"
or "parasitic loafers"

"Reapers" and "Predators"
eleven million dollars each
an altogether grim business

"unmanned"
good try, but it wouldn't
happen without one of us

250 pairs of "eyes in the sky"
pilots in Nevada
bombing civilians in Iraq

"engaging insurgents"
"successfully taking them out"
and making it home in time for dinner

"enlarging the battlefield"
when you back off far enough
around a globe you become the enemy

A recent image on the cover of Time magazine brought about a reaction poem with stronger words than I normally find myself using.

And so, poetry has been
a way for me to look back
on my life's journey
and pay attention
to the discovery of our
unity in God
with all of creation.

OSAMA'S BOYS

The image that rose up
during morning meditation
a Muslim woman on the cover of Time
they had cut off her nose and ears

I found my heart
filled with disgust and hatred
I longed to squash them
under the heel of my righteousness

Then vomit on their remains
until I heard that voice
cry out from the cross
Forgive them for they know not

Who they are

I owe a debt of gratitude for the support and input of my poetry group which has met monthly to share our poetry. Poet Mary Oliver claims that she revises her work thirty or forty times before publication.

The comments of companion poets have been invaluable in the process of finalizing a poem. I also found it helpful to have to meet the monthly challenge of a deadline to produce results.

I mentioned above the absolute necessity of a change of consciousness in the human community. Hopefully this can bring about an equally essential change in the structure of Church and State. David Korten calls this "The Great Turning" from Empire to Earth Community.

I ask their name and
write on the cover page
"For Mary, Also Born of the Fire."

MYSTICAL BODY

Jesus
named the leader
Rock
not air, fire or water

Rock
Earth
Base
down there
at the foot

DISSECTING THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Line up
your hand, heart and mind
with your voice
speaking devotion and loyalty
to a land and a government
not just a united states
but the republic it names

This body of people
unsustainable without
the territory they stand on
which absolutely includes
the flora and fauna
of their bio-region

The body of conscious ones
awakening to the fact
that they are within
rather than under God
beginning to suspect
that they are one with more
than they can imagine

And no, the word is not "individual"
say again in-di-vis-ible
meaning cannot be separated
into those with/without liberty
those with/without justice
beginning to realize
the cosmic unity of all

And so, poetry has been a way for me to look back on my life's journey and pay attention to the discovery of our unity in God with all of creation. People who come to readings at public libraries, book stores and other gathering places often ask for your signature on your published book. It has been easy for me to choose a simple phrase for all of them. I ask their name and write on the cover page "For Mary, Also Born of the Fire."



Dandelion Wisdom

As one lone star glows among trillions of billions

Unfathomable as dust

A single dandelion beyond the infirmary window nods,

"OK," she says. "It's OK to die."

"A solitary flame I am

twisting through oceans of night with you."

— Mary O. Sears, R.S.M.

Wisdom

*"concerns itself solely with holding oneself and others in the light
and surrendering to God."*

Barbara Fiand. *Prayer and the Quest for Healing*, p.101.

Priscilla And Aquila: Then and Now

Noel Keller, R.S.M.

For the past forty years, the desire to create and sustain more participative team - based efforts in the workplace has been the million dollar goal for corporate, educational, and church communities. This is because people have come to see that team efforts produce significantly greater results; and they would do anything to achieve them. Team based efforts are not a new concept, however, for there is a quintessential example of a team based effort in the New Testament. Its players are Priscilla and Aquila of Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Priscilla and Aquila make six appearances in the New Testament and their importance is highlighted by three different authors. Twice they are mentioned in Paul (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3); three times by Luke in Acts (18:1-3, 18-19, 26-27); and once in a Deutero-Pauline letter (2 Tim 4:19). Later, John Chrysostom (347-407 CE), an early commentator of the New Testament, comments on them in his homilies: Homily 40 on the Acts of the Apostles [18:18], Homily 44 on First Corinthians [16:19], Homily 30 on Romans [16:3-5], and, Homily 10 on Second Timothy [4:9-13]. He also raises them up in his First Homily on Rom 16:3-4, which is known as "*Salutate Priscillam et Aquilam*." That Priscilla and Aquila are usually mentioned together suggests this couple worked as a team.¹ In fact, they are "the most beautiful example known to us in the apostolic age of the power for good that could be exerted by a husband and wife working in unison for the advancement of the Gospel."² Having said this, it is worth our while to learn from them. Thus, I will examine the attributes of a team; lay out what Luke and Paul say about them, showing how they impacted the lives of the early believers; suggest ways in which they exemplify the components of a team; and draw out some lessons for us.

Definition and Attributes of a Team

BusinessDictionary.com defines a team as:

"A group of people with a full set of complementary skills required to complete a task, job, or project. Team members operate with a high degree of interdependence; share authority and responsibility for self-management; are accountable for the collective performance; and work toward a common goal and shared rewards." From this definition three points can be made: (1) a team is more than the sum of its parts, for a strong sense of mutual commitment creates synergy, producing results that are greater than the individual members could have created on their own. In other words, success is achieved through a mixed-talent bag! (2) Each member works as hard as they can to make their co-workers look good, since it is the achievement of the goal and not personal glory which is at stake. As such, a spirit of competition cannot exist. (3) Team members take accountability and responsibility for their actions since the results will only be as successful as each member gives their all. It is an 'us' that produces. These principles also apply to people who are involved in team ministry, such as those in community leadership

Priscilla and Aquila are Introduced

(Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 26-27)

Despite the fact that Paul's letters were written prior to Acts, it is usually through Luke that today's Christians hear about this couple. Accordingly, we meet them in the second half of Acts which Luke devotes to the achievements of Paul. As such, they are, as any person Luke identifies, "supporting players" to his hero and star. That they appear at all underscores their importance. Paul has just left Athens after a less than stellar experience there and he goes forty miles west to Corinth, which was an important port city that attracted a diverse population. It was the type of place, his strategic eye discerned as a promising center for spreading the message about Jesus; and, with so

many transients, it was also a place where he could earn a living. Most likely, the first thing Paul did when he arrived was to find the synagogue (Acts 18:5, 14; cf. 14:1; 16:3. etc.), for there, he could locate the section where the guild of "tentmakers" sat. On arrival "he found a [Judean] named Aquila" (Acts 18:2), and, to be sure, Priscilla, with him. They will appear three times in this chapter.

Scene One: Acts 18:1-3

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Judean named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Judeans to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them; and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers.

Luke tells us four things about Priscilla and Aquila: They are (1) a married couple (2) recently expelled from Rome (3) who relocated in Corinth as tentmakers and/or leatherworker sand, (4) with whom Paul lived and worked. By examining each piece, we will discover so much more about them than we first thought.

(1) Aquila and Priscilla are a married couple.

Luke tells us Aquila is a Judean from Pontus, which means he was a Diaspora Judean.³ How he got to Rome is a matter of speculation. Scholarly possibilities range from Aquila being an independent businessman-adventurer looking for greener pastures to his being a free man, slave, or freed slave of the Roman Acilian family, within whose house he met Priscilla, she was a free woman, slave, or daughter of a freedman of the same family. Recently, Peter Lampe presents a new and intriguing possibility; for in using epigraphical material, he shows that both Priscilla and Aquila's names were not slave names, and thereby asserts they must have been born free persons.⁴ No matter how they started

their lives, however, by the time we meet them; most interpreters think they were already married.⁵

(2) Recently expelled from Rome

The emperor Claudius deported Judeans from Rome on account of riots, which he viewed as an egregious "disorder." Suetonius refers to this event in his *Life of Claudius*, but does not date the expulsion. A later Christian historian suggests it happened in 49 CE, and, his date is the one with which most scholars agree.⁶ Luke also claims Claudius expelled 'all the Judeans,' but as there were between forty to fifty thousand Judeans in Rome at that time, his assertion is astonishing. Moreover, had such numbers been deported, historians would have noted it. Besides, Luke uses hyperbole as a way of underlining the importance of something. Thus, it is likely that only the chief leaders in the dispute that arose were expelled. Obviously, Judean Christian believers were preaching Jesus as Messiah and mainstream Judeans who considered their claims blasphemous reacted.⁷ Leaders of both 'factions' were expelled. Priscilla and Aquila were among them.

Luke tells us four things about Priscilla and Aquila:

**They are (1) a married couple
(2) recently expelled from Rome
(3) who relocated in Corinth as
tentmakers and/or leatherworkers
and, (4) with whom Paul
lived and worked.**

**By examining each piece, we will
discover so much more about them
than we first thought.**

That this couple was deported for their missionary efforts indicates they were already followers of Jesus. It is a fact Luke never mentions, for in doing so, he would have to

admit there was an active following of Jesus in Corinth before "his star" arrived!⁸ Yet, their later appearances in Acts clearly show that Priscilla and Aquila were "practicing" believers (18:18, 26). They were on fire about Jesus in Rome, and, it stands to reason, they were preaching Christ in Corinth before Paul arrived (50/51 CE).

(3) Who relocated in Corinth as tentmakers and/or leatherworkers⁹

During the New Testament era, residents of the Roman Empire travelled the Mediterranean region by both land and sea with an ease that would not appear again until the nineteenth century. It is likely Priscilla and Aquila walked the Appian Way to Brindisi. From there they sailed to Corinth between the late spring to early fall which was the sailing season, and they arrived at the port of Lechaeon. Perhaps, other expelled Judean Christ-believers (such as some of those mentioned in Romans 16) traveled with them, for they would all be looking for a place to live and practice their faith until they could go home. Besides, Corinth was an ideal place for Priscilla and Aquila to ply their trade. With so many people, there would be a constant need for awnings for private houses and for shops in the forum, as well as for tents used for market booths. Furthermore, as the Isthmian Games (the second most important competition of the four Pan-Hellenic festivals) were celebrated in the spring of 49 CE there would be a need for temporary lodgings for its visitors. Consequently, if Priscilla and Aquila arrived beforehand, they would be employed making tents; but if they arrived afterwards there was still plenty to do, since repairs on used tents would be necessary. New tents would also be needed to be made as the next games were only fifteen months away.¹⁰

(4) With whom Paul lived and worked

Paul may have left Athens a disheartened missionary but in the plan of God there was a surprise waiting for him in Corinth.

There he met a couple who not only shared his trade, but their home and faith as well. It was an unbeatable triad, and part of the hundredfold the gospel promises (cf. Mk 10:30). That two independent artisans were able to extend hospitality to Paul suggests they did not operate at a subsistence level; but this scarcely places them among the elite. Indeed, John Chrysostom (*First Homily*, 47) depicts them as "poor and living by the work of their hands," as do other early church writers.¹¹ Paul's own testimony confirms this picture (Cf. 2 Cor 11:9). Perhaps they lived in a rented space in a room above their workshop.¹² Believers gathered in their home for prayer and the Eucharist in the evenings and later, Paul slept in their workshop amid the tool-strewn work benches and rolls of leather and canvas. This arrangement succeeded in the beginning, for Paul could work while holding important conversations with customers, or with others who dropped by. No doubt Priscilla and Aquila assisted him. Their efforts are no more recounted than are the missionary efforts of Silas and Timothy; but that is not to deny them. Moreover, as their shared goal was preaching Christ, receiving credit was not an issue.

As time went on the number of new believers increased, and Paul needed a larger space than the one his friends provided. Thus, after he left the synagogue, he moved his preaching activities into the larger house of Titius Justus, a "godfearer" (i.e. a non-Judean synagogue adherent) who had presumably become a believer. Besides, his house was next to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). Undoubtedly, Paul returned every evening to the home and people who gave him the strength to continue his efforts.

Scene Two: Acts 18:18-19

After these things [removal from the synagogue and his trial before Gallio], Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and [he took] with him Priscilla and Aquila...

Syria, and [he took] with him Priscilla and Aquila... And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there.

Eighteen months separate verses Acts 18: 1-3 from Acts 18: 18-19. In between, Paul lived and worked with Priscilla and Aquila (18: 1-3); and he preached in the synagogue until he was cast out of it (18:6). Indeed, Paul met the same opposition his friends met in Rome, to the point that the Judeans brought him before Gallio, the Roman governor in vv 12-17. Surely Priscilla and Aquila were nearby to support him.

Members of the synagogue were his critics since they were threatened by his words and the effect they seemed to have on their leaders (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14). In response, they charged Paul was preaching a faith that was not recognized by Rome and hence a threat to her best interests. But Gallio, realizing their charge was an internal matter, brought the proceedings to an end. In effect, he granted Paul and his fledgling group the same protection which Roman law had given to the practice of Judaism. And so "after these things" and with renewed assurance, Paul stayed a little while longer, in partnership ministry with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18). And when he was ready to move from Corinth, at the point he was sure that others could continue what they had begun, he asked them to accompany him to Ephesus. To agree to his plan would be a sacrifice since they would lose whatever trade they had managed to build up. But, committed to the gospel, they left everything, and accompanied him 250 miles across the Aegean Sea to the third largest city in the Empire.

Luke again positions Paul as the initiator of a new mission. Consequently, he has Paul go to the synagogue and argue with the Judeans (Acts 18:18-23). Then he leaves, and doesn't return until Chapter 19, when he probably lived again with Priscilla and Aquila. Later, when he writes to the Corinthians from Ephesus, he will include their greetings in his letter (1 Cor 16:19). In his absence, Priscilla and Aquila did the same

kind of things they did in Rome and Corinth, and they functioned much like Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, and the other Pauline missionary partners did.

Scene Three: Acts 18:26-27

He [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him.

The only activity Luke reports about Priscilla and Aquila's missionary endeavors is that they taught Apollos, a Judean native of Alexandria, whom he depicts as an "eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures," (18:24), who was instructed in the way of the Lord (18: 25a). By saying this, Luke means Apollos had received formal instruction about Jesus; for here, as elsewhere in Acts, "Lord" refers to Jesus. His instruction had some deficiencies, however, which Priscilla and Aquila catch upon hearing him speak in the synagogue and they responded as good missionaries would, by taking him aside and expounding to him "the way of God more accurately" (v. 26b). In fact, they shared Paul's theological outlook with Apollos, which is an assertion Paul implies later in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. That Priscilla is named first may suggest she is Apollos' main tutor as John Chrysostom puts forward (cf. *First Homily*, 18). Whatever the case, what is demonstrated is that both of these people were knowledgeable enough to teach this teacher; and their competence is confirmed by his later success in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 3:6).

Priscilla and Aquila also show their diplomatic and pastoral sense in that instead of challenging Apollos publicly, they took him aside, perhaps to their home. Obviously, their teaching was effective, for when Apollos wished to move on to Achaia, the brethren (i.e. those

converted by the brief appearance of Paul; or more likely, from the missionary activities of Priscilla and Aquila), encouraged him and wrote to the Corinthian believers to receive him (Acts 18:27). Surely, Priscilla and Aquila's name in this letter spoke volumes, for at that time, letters were considered a form of presence, and the Corinthians already knew and trusted this couple.

Priscilla and Aquila's impact on the lives and faith of the early believers

Having spent some time with Priscilla and Aquila, we have discovered there is more to this couple than Luke's introduction of them (Acts 18:1-3) first suggests. If someone were asked to describe them based on this description, their answer would be something like this: This is a hospitable, artisan couple, who despite adversity were able to relocate, and ultimately share their home, faith, and trade with Paul.

Having dug deeper, let us consider a new way to think about them. (1) Priscilla and Aquila were active Judean Christ believers and leaders in Rome and Corinth before they met Paul. Indeed, their initial work in Corinth made it easier for his missionary activity when he arrived there, despite the fact that Luke never mentions it. (2) Paul trusted them, and they supported each another not only financially, but spiritually as well. Surely through the eighteen months they were together, their many conversations, and prayer times enabled them 'to stay the line' despite adversity. (3) Paul later included them in his plans to further the mission when he left Corinth, and they, as *missionaries* (a term Luke never applies to them), left everything to be part of it. (4) From the start, this "triad" were coworkers in Christ Jesus. In truth, Paul left them "in charge" in Ephesus when he moved on, and to do there what they had already done in Rome and Corinth. If we were now to ask someone to describe them based on this

description, we would hear: Priscilla and Aquila were a (1) missionary couple (2) who as active Judean Christ believers and leaders in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus (3) were coworkers, founders, and hosts of the various Jesus groups for the cause of Christ with Paul. Paul emphatically states he planted the seed (1 Cor 3:6), laid a foundation (1 Cor 3:10), and begot the Corinthians in Christ Jesus through his preaching of the gospel (1 Cor 4:15b), which are all part of the argument he makes later on in an attempt to unify the community after the trio had left them (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-4:21). I am still convinced that the origins of the Corinthian group *began* with Priscilla and Aquila, along with the other Judean Christian believers who were expelled from Rome and who relocated with them in Corinth. These nascent believers must have frequently gathered together to nurture their faith, and in so doing provided an example which piqued their neighbor's interest and which encouraged them to give Paul a hearing when he arrived there. *They were a presence that strengthened.*

Paul's Testimony

Having learned about this couple from a person who did not know them, it is important to hear from someone who did. Indeed, Paul's letters only confirms their importance. From him we learn that the early believers met in their home in both Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19b) and Rome (Rom 16:5), which the Corinthians to whom he sent their greetings would remember doing themselves. In fact, John Chrysostom later notes their hospitality showed "no small excellency" in their regard (*Homily 44 on First Corinthians*, v 19); for as hosts, they provided the setting where believers could be nourished by prayer, the Word, and the Eucharist. And since the Lord's Supper was still celebrated within the context of a full meal (1 Cor 11), as patrons, they would have supplemented

what the community brought. Finally, as leaders they would have been responsible for building up the body' by maintaining order.¹³

Paul also acknowledges this couple as his "co-workers" in Christ Jesus in Rom 16:3, which is a term he uses when he refers to his colleagues. Moreover, he says they were faithful to the point of "risking their necks for his life," which is a metaphor that means they stood by him (and for God) when their own lives were put at risk. In fact, they probably suffered financial setbacks for the sake of the mission, which is another form of "risking your neck". Finally, a letter, written in Paul's name (2 Tim 4:19), and which is supposed to be his last letter, extols their fidelity and pastoral sense. That they are listed first testifies to the enormous regard early believers and, in particular, its author knew Paul had for them.

Priscilla and Aquila and the Attributes of a Team

Priscilla and Aquila meet the components BusinessDictionary.com suggests constitute a team. (1) They worked together as the joint presentation of their names proposes. Yet, they also worked separately, since as teachers and hosts in the various communities we find them in, they would have taken on different responsibilities to ensure order—for the good of the whole community. That their greetings were sent as a couple to these communities, and received as such, must mean their influence (in its various capacities) was acknowledged and appreciated (both in their own time and later in a Deutero-Pauline letter). (2) The goal of proclaiming Jesus as God's Messiah motivated their efforts. In fact, the price such a proclamation might entail never deterred them. That they could be expelled from one place, and begin again hundreds of miles away, is a testimony to their faith and courage; and they were willing to move as many times as it took to

achieve the goal. That these early communities endured is a testimony, in part, to their efforts. (3) They never saw Paul's arrival in Corinth as a threat to their ministry, for they were all working toward a common goal. As such, each person enhanced the other's gifts, since it was as an "us" that they produced. Indeed, Paul asked them to accompany him to Ephesus and to do there what they had already done before he met them. He even raised up their names when he wrote to the Christ believers in Rome (ca 57 AD). In sum, at every moment, and in every way Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul were co-workers in Christ Jesus.

Lessons for Today

While there are many *other* ways in which Priscilla and Aquila can serve as positive role models for us today, for the sake of brevity, I will suggest four of them:

- ❖ Priscilla and Aquila are models for conjugal life. They succeeded in doing the things they did because they lived and acted as one, without losing their individuality. Surely they must have encouraged, supported, and challenged each other. Moreover, they knew and appreciated each others gifts and strengths and they made the most of them. No one was threatened; everyone benefitted.
- ❖ Priscilla and Aquila are models for the laity; in addition, they show the importance and place of lay leadership in the *ekklēsia* right from the start.
- ❖ Priscilla teaches us the importance of women's equal leadership, for it is as an "us" that the realization of the mission will be advanced through a mixed-talent bag.

- ❖ Priscilla and Aquila teach us the importance of friendship and its necessity for endurance.

Here I boldly suggest that it is more than likely this couple makes a seventh appearance in the New Testament, and one that no one (to my knowledge) has ever mentioned. It is in Acts 28:14b-15 (my translation): *"And when Paul came to Rome (ca 60 CE), the believers from there, when they heard about him, came as far as the Forum of Appius (43 miles from Rome), while some went to Three Taverns (33 miles from Rome) to meet him. And, on seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage..... for their arrival showed him, that despite his chains, he had friends in the capital city. Based on their previous behavior, it is more than likely Priscilla and Aquila were among them; since we know from Paul's Letter to the Romans (written ca 57 CE), that they had returned to Rome."*¹⁴ Moreover, they were probably among the group that had walked the longer distance to be with him. Then, as now, they are a great couple for us to travel with and to learn from.

Notes

¹ Much ink has been spilled regarding the placement of Priscilla and Aquila's names in the texts, as in four of the six places in which their names occur; Priscilla's name precedes her husbands. Yet for whatever reason, in a very real way the alternating order simply reinforces the mutuality of this couple's relationship.

² A.C. McGiffert, *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 427.

³ As the terms 'Jew' and 'Christian' did not mean in the First Century what they do today, I will use these terms in the same way the early believers used them. For further enunciation see Marie Noël Keller, *Priscilla and Aquila: Paul's Coworkers in Christ Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), xvii-xviii.

⁴ See *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. Michael Steinhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 153-83.

⁵ I agree, but see Keller, *Priscilla and Aquila*, 4-7 for a discussion of opposing views.

⁶ See Paulus Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos* 7.6.15-16.

⁷ As the Torah stated that anyone who was put to death by hanging would be cursed by God (cf. Deut 21: 22-23), mainstream Judeans would have considered their claims preposterous.

⁸ Since Paul doesn't include an account of baptizing them, and names Stephanus and his household as his 'first converts' (1 Cor 16:15), they must have already been baptized.

⁹ The term *skēnopoios* describes a person who makes tents; but in a wider sense, it also denotes an artisan who worked with linen, canvas, or leather.

¹⁰ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 259.

¹¹ This is probably why Priscilla worked, since wives were often required to assist their husbands in difficult manual trades, simply to make ends meet.

¹² Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 193 claims, their move from Corinth after eighteen months (Acts 18:11) indicates they did not possess real estate in Corinth, since it would have held them back. Instead they rented a workshop-residence which was available for just such craftspeople.

¹³ Indeed, Paul was disappointed that later leaders in Corinth hadn't maintained the necessary order of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11); functioned as arbitrators of disputes within the community (1 Cor 6); or maintained a moral discipline (1 Cor 5).

¹⁴ I agree with those scholars who see Romans 16 as an integral part of Paul's letter. Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grande Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-6 is an example.



Jonah: A Parable of Transformation

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Overview

The story of Jonah describes profound personal transformation. The story can be read as a "before" and an "after." What were the causes before the story that led up to Jonah being swallowed by the whale? What's the after? It's a form of gestation and birth. The whale is a mammal, and perhaps recognizes Jonah as "one of her own." Is it female energy that has swallowed Jonah? Does the whale out of compassion keep him in her womb, as it were? Is he too ornery to be digested? The normal process of nature is suspended. Jonah does not die; he is not digested. He doesn't go anywhere but where the whale goes, like a child in the womb. He draws nourishment somehow from inside the whale.

After all the storms, and rejection by his companions, he is thrown overboard. What are the experiences we have had of being thrown overboard? When have we felt victimized, blamed, made the scapegoat, and then perhaps half-willingly sacrificed ourselves?

And who is the god of the sea—the pagan or cosmic forces—that react by stilling the storm? What brings about peace in the world around Jonah? What is the "three days"? He has been helpless, enclosed, and uncertain, confined within an environment which is both natural and unnatural. He should be dead, but he is alive, carried by a living being within the deep water through which the whale passes.

At a certain time, over which he has no control—when it is enough—he is coughed up on the shore. Where he was before is not where he is now. He cannot explain this part of the journey. Despite his survival, he has not totally changed and become compassionate and wise after being regurgitated by the whale. He is still inclined to petulance and willfulness. God still takes pains

to instruct him though it seems by parable, a less dramatic means than being swallowed by a whale. The story ends with God speaking, and going on speaking.

There is some debate in biblical scholarship about whether to classify Jonah as part of the prophetic literature, or as part of the wisdom literature. For our purposes, we will focus on the text as a fictional story that can be interpreted in many different ways.

**After all the storms, and
Rejection by his companions,
he is thrown overboard.
What are the experiences we have had
of being thrown overboard?**

This is not a complete biography of Jonah, but a story that probably focuses on just a few weeks in Jonah's life. We don't know the beginning of his life, where exactly he was raised, nor his education, his religious training, or his family history. We don't know how his life ends.

On the other hand, this is not really a biography. It is pure fiction, a humorous series of parables, comic stories, and improbable adventures. It's a few episodes from a certain intense period in Jonah's life, but still a fable. It could be said that this considers a gifted, person who has reached a particularly disgusted phase of life—fed up with religion, fed up with the religious institution, and fed up with God.

He is sitting down—who knows for how long—and receives a summons from God to get up and go convert the people of Nineveh. He doesn't explicitly refuse; he just attempts to escape from God by taking a boat across the ocean. However, his escape goes awry. He is caught in a storm, blamed for the disaster by the sailors, thrown

into the sea and swallowed by a whale. Inside the whale, in the dark of a traumatic experience that feels like death and burial, he undergoes a transformation and re-vival of his religious sensibilities, his relationship with God, his self-understanding, and his power to pray.

He is miraculously saved from physical death and coughed up onto shore by the whale. After his deliverance he carries out his mission to Nineveh. Despite the dazzling success of his fire-and-brimstone mission to convert these heathen people, Jonah is distressed and discontent because he didn't witness the destruction of Nineveh. God instructs him through a parable about divine compassion which gives life to all things on earth, whether it be life to a leafy vine, the Ninevites themselves, or their cattle. We have no idea what becomes of Jonah, whether he adopted this theology of a compassionate God, or whether God ever attempted to send him on another mission.

The parable invites us to select a period from our own life, perhaps a traumatic experience, reflect on how we survived, what we learned, and what prayer is the fruit of that rescue. It is also the occasion to reflect on our relationship to the religious institution and our particular theology and relationship to God. What is the story of our rebirth from the depths of the sea, from inside a mothering whale, a return to the land of the living, a recovery of our sense of ourselves, and fidelity to our personal mission? As we find ourselves at "the roots of the mountains," we look at our understanding of how God has acted in our life. What phrases in Jonah's prayer inspire our own psalm?

Jonah son of Amittai

We are introduced to a man who is known only by his father's name. So here begins the problem. Who was his mother? Is that part of Jonah's

problem—that he is missing part of his identity? Does mothering in the belly of whale return Jonah to his feminine energy that he has ignored up to now? So what of myself do I draw from my mother? What lives in me of her best qualities, habits, priorities and gifts? Or would I rather forget my mother, and be named only for my father? In my present self, have I divorced my mother but not my father? So what makes me daughter of my father? How am I daughter of my mother and her mother?

"Up," he said, "Go to Nineveh, the great city and inform them that their wickedness has become known to me."

What has Jonah been doing prior to God's interruption? Has Jonah had thoughts of his mission before? Jonah has to be urged by God. Does he hear God's voice, or have a meeting with someone who looks god-like? We don't know if Jonah has brushed off this thought or attempt by God before. In any event, he is overcome with dread. Or what emotions are they? It's not a welcome task. Jonah has been sitting, doing nothing, or at least he is not described as being in the middle of another activity when God's annunciation breaks in. Jonah's response is not conversation or engagement. He avoids dialogue. He doesn't express his feelings. He avoids an answer. He turns his back on God. He responds to God, if one can call it that, by silence, refusal, flight, and avoidance.

"Up," he said, "Go to Nineveh, the great city and inform them that their wickedness has become known to me."

(1) Reflection on Why Some Tasks Are Unwelcome

When I have been presented with an unwelcome task, why do I not want to do it? I remember

several objections I felt in the past when my teaching assignment was changed: I had come to

message from God! So what's the problem for Jonah?

be good at what I was doing here, so why the change? And the seeming mind-lessness of the re-assignment. Favoritism seemed to be shown others and my interests or desires seemed of little or no consequence to the deciders.

Jonah is having an argument with himself about what his personal mission is. He seems to be sitting down, doing nothing, avoiding, procrastinating and waiting. God summons him, "Up." He isn't going any-where in his life until God gives him a direction? But as a job offer, it's an unpleasant task of correcting, reprimanding, perhaps threatening people who don't believe in the God of Israel. He is supposed to assert God's authority over people he doesn't know. He's supposed to condemn their personal and public behavior, and then tell them the God of Jonah, his God, is not pleased with them. He is supposed to turn their allegiance to the God of Israel.

On the other hand, who doesn't like approval from someone in authority, and the role of being appointed as the agent or representative of someone important and respected? Paul of Tarsus began his career appointed by the religious leadership in Jerusalem to go to Damascus, enforce orthodoxy of belief and root out the heretics. Jonah is offered an appealing mission from this perspective. He has been approved by God to go tell the Ninevites that God does not approve of their behavior. Jonah gets to announce the rules of moral conduct, test compliance, and inform the Ninevites that they don't measure up to God's standards. He holds the power to announce God's approval and disapproval. He gets to act, with divine appointment, as judge of Nineveh's morality. An insignificant Jew is being sent to a powerful, noteworthy city with a

(2) Reflection on My Need for Approval

The normal human being, presented with an opportunity to show his or her authority, doesn't hesitate. Power is a drug for most human beings. We crave approval, especially in the form of "delegated authority," and we submit to the rules for accessing this power quite readily. The greatest hope of the craven seeker of power is that by your submission to someone else, you will eventually acquire that same power over someone else, and they will then submit to you. What have you not done, that you wanted to do, because it didn't have approval from someone in authority?

Jonah doesn't bite when God offers him a plum assignment. Does Jonah become fearful, like a hesitant, pusillanimous woman? Instead of "standing up like a man" and facing his task as one of God's shock troops, he's so afraid he turns deserter? Does the very idea of going to Nineveh make him turn tail? What kind of sense does that make? What are the reasons a person doesn't want to do a demanding task?

Is it that Jonah just didn't want to work hard at anything, plain and simple? Didn't want to exert any effort? Had he thought it was time to retire from life? We don't know his work history, or what his job was before he sat down. Who knows how many jobs he was offered by God prior to the Nineveh mission. Maybe, said God, if I offer him a really important job, to an important city, with a disciplinary task in my name, a correction of others' behavior, being the moral authority, being right—maybe that will get him up. But even this important task aimed at appealing to all his human tendencies, doesn't move Jonah.

On the other hand, Nineveh could appear like professional suicide, and Jonah is no fool. It's an unreasonable risk to his life. Along with this risk to Jonah's life, too many other things could be put into question. If Jonah goes to Nineveh, will he be able to return to Israel? How and when could he come back? Are there term limits to God's directive? To be fair to Jonah, why should he let the whole mission of conversion of Nineveh be dumped in his lap? Doesn't such a mission of its nature call for a missionary team? He could feel overwhelmed by a task that involves a foreign country. Does he speak the language? Is part of his difficulty his uncertainty about how to deal with the cultural dissonance? The Ninevites could be perceived as a less developed, less civilized, an alien, barbaric people despite their urban development. Does he like his life at home, even if he is not progressing, not developing himself, or doing anything of significance for anyone else?

Where is God for Jonah? He seems to imagine that God lives in Israel. He is after all, the God of Israel. If he can get away from the voice and nagging of this demanding presence near him, he won't have to do the task. This God will stay in Israel, and Jonah will take up his life somewhere else. Did God's voice persist, like a noisy neighbor pestering Jonah? Jonah doesn't enter into conversation with God. It's hard to gauge his feeling, but it is urgent. As though he has discovered his name on a death list, he flees to Joppa, the seaport, finds a boat going far away, across the Mediterranean sea, pays his fare and gets on board. He will go with strangers to a far off, unknown city of Tarshish, just to get away from God's demands. Jonah's theology seems to be primitive and undeveloped. God can be left behind if he moves to a different place far away. It is notable that he flees west, not east. He doesn't go across land toward Nineveh. He decides that a sea voyage to a distant port in the west will put greater distance between himself

and the Lord than going east across land toward Assyria (present day Iraq).

Is the flight from the consciousness he has of God? What will kill off and silence that consciousness of the unwelcome task? Tarshish is the name of all the distractions from a life-task that stares us in the face. Tarshish is the direction of avoidance, denial, and procrastination, especially from the unfinished business of our own lives.

(3) Reflection on Why I Have or Haven't Followed a Ministry Possibility

Women flee a present life task pressing on them in a hundred ways. It is easier to do nothing than something. It is easier to do a domestic task than a public one. It is preferable to do a work for others right now, rather than go off to a distant place to take care of strangers. It's easier to do a familiar task, even nothing at all, than to learn something new or venture outside the boundaries. It is easier to do a task where one is not noticed. It's easier to go below and hide in the hold rather than engage other people. It's easier to conceal one's identity than tell one's story. Nineveh is the equivalent of a public task and that goes against the grain of women who are trained to seek unobtrusiveness, non-expressiveness, humility, hiddenness and anonymity. Nineveh is a command to go on stage. It is terror to an introvert, and distasteful to many women religious. For one without administrative credentials, how can she take on a duty where she is in charge? Doesn't she need more training?

Women can also argue, for a task like this, one shouldn't go alone. It isn't safe. One needs professional assistance, someone better trained, a woman says, willing to cooperate with others, as long as they are sent, too. It is also easier to do a task of one's own choosing than the task God presents. As long as I am moving, I am going somewhere. Tarshish is the opposite direction

from Nineveh. So if I go west, instead of east, I am on the move. If life is a journey, then as long as I am on any journey, it is a valid one, especially if it's a journey I have chosen to make, and not to make another one.

Have I, in determinedly taking one journey, actually avoided taking the one God destined me for? Have I put off the journey in the direction my heart knows is the right one, but which I am resisting by staying on the move? Have I let my life be absorbed by trivial tasks, good tasks that take up all my time, but aren't arising out of a larger mission to me from God? Have I paid attention to what that mission is, or am I frittering away my time? Am I avoiding facing a life issue, putting it off, and boarding a boat to Tarshish instead of confronting the big question, the crucial question, the life-changer?

We could sympathize with Jonah if he were confused, lacked skills, or lacked courage. But Jonah is quite clear about making his own journey according to his own direction. He makes a plan. He is ready for a voyage, has the means to buy a ticket to a sea port at the furthest end of the Mediterranean. Land travel to Nineveh would be cheaper, should he choose a destination based on cost. Sea travel is more expensive than land transport. Sea travel is much more risky to one's safety. So it is not that he lacks the will to travel, or the means, or the knowledge of the world, or the willingness to risk himself. But he will not go to Nineveh. He is willing to pay a very high cost to escape the destination God has assigned him. And it comes at a high cost to a lot of other people.

Jonah could be telling himself that this is a possibility. That God gives him a free choice. But this not merely an invitation. It was a command from God. In the face of giving God submission, Jonah behaves like a child or adolescent. If he

runs away from home, he won't have to obey his father's commands any more.

Jonah had fallen fast asleep

All seems to be well at the beginning while Jonah is making his escape. But very soon, the God of Israel, like Neptune, foments a storm that threatens everyone's life on board. It is a calamitous storm, a disruption of order. Jonah's turning away from God disrupts the calm of the ocean, the smooth blowing of the wind, and the rhythms of sea-faring. It is not just a squall that passes after an hour or two. It is a violent storm that grows worse and more threatening. If sailors had anticipated the storm, they would not have set sail in such bad weather. But the storm arises without warning.

All the sailors are terrified and call out to their gods for rescue. They are good men, worshippers who turn to their gods for help in a time of danger. There is chaos all around. The gods they call upon are non-existent. Nevertheless, they show themselves to be men of faith, appealing to the higher powers for assistance. The ship is at the point of breaking up. The natural world is in turmoil. Sailors are afraid, throwing cargo into the sea. Their lives are in immediate danger. They are caught up in the danger and fear of this moment of human life. They act together, trying to save one another and save the ship.

Where is Jonah? He didn't reply when God summoned him a short time earlier. His answer was not to say Yes, not to dialogue, but to avoid conversation by walking out and leaving the scene. Now he has absented himself, not only from God, but from human society itself. He has gone below deck, disconnected himself from the world above board. There is no storm in his life. It is the artificial calm created by denial, avoidance, and

non-contactability. He has gone to a part of the ship no one else inhabits or works, the hold.

Now he has escaped even from his escape. He has fallen asleep. His consciousness is disconnected from events. He is unaware of the storm. He has separated himself from the sailors and their terrified, desperate efforts to save their lives. They throw cargo overboard. He is not there to lend a hand, even for the task of staying alive. He has dehumanized himself by the distance he has created between himself and his fellow human beings. He is so deeply asleep he might as well be dead. They pray to their gods. He is not moved to pray. He is asleep.

The boatswain comes below to rouse him. Does he have to shake him up from his deep sleep and unconsciousness? Jonah is not conscious of anyone but himself. He has forgotten everything but his own physical need, his weariness, his ennui, his boredom, even his fear. He has turned off his memory, his mind, his feelings, his engagement with others. He has fled God, and in fleeing God, he turns away from other human beings. He's found his way to the hold of the ship, below deck. He is the exceptional person, not having to share the sufferings of others. He is tuned out. In the ship's hold, he is passive, inactive, disconnected, alone. He wants to be carried, like inert, inanimate cargo, and assume no responsibility for anyone, even himself. He is being carried and letting everyone else do the work of taking risks and shouldering the burden of life. Even an emergency doesn't move him to act differently. He is not doing anything. Or has he assumed that "being himself" is enough and doesn't require doing anything more than sleeping, eating, sleeping, and being carried along in the ship of human life? Perhaps he also felt he was privileged and didn't have to join the common lot of humanity because he had paid for his ticket, and enjoyed the right to be like cargo—carried and not bothered until they all reached

their destination. In effect, everyone is his servant. He is servant to no one.

(4) Reflection on Whether I'm Asleep

For women religious, it is possible to "be asleep" to the rest of the world under cover of having left the world, an older spirituality. Have we fallen asleep to God's summons? Have we gone below into the hold of the ship of life and religious destiny, where no one will find us? Have we craved anonymity and namelessness, convincing ourselves that this is holiness? Have we used Jonah's excuses to avoid conversation, to avoid the task we could undertake, to avoid engagement with others, to avoid self-revelation, to avoid the direction we could have gone, to avoid doing a difficult work of correcting a part of the world—even of ourselves—that needs to be turned around?

Being asleep is an image that expresses what we don't want to know, don't feel up to engaging. Being asleep is the state of non-questioning congregational policy, a child-like trust that "they" will make the right decisions that I don't have to critique or be part of. Sleep is tuning out, pulling the plug on connections, taking time out to do nothing, avoiding disputes, keeping perfect peace, having no issues. Sleep is handing over responsibility to someone else to guide the ship, do the rescue of it from storms, and keep all the workers engaged, as long as the engagement doesn't involve me. A sleeper is not a worker, but the one who has opted out, to do her own thing, to be carried. Sleep is what babies and children do much of the time.

For women who are educated, sleep is the way to shut down intelligent critique, the power to think, share concerns and express oneself in community discussion. Sleep is an escape from adulthood. Sleep is what research shows adolescents need more of than adults. So sleep,

while necessary, is also the expression of regression to an earlier stage of life. Sleeping a lot, or staying in a coma, is also a signal that someone's life is coming to a close. Sleeping a lot means I have opted out of discussion, disagreement, or having to explain myself. It's a comfortable, peaceful way to live. But it's a form of death.

The sailors are conscious of Jonah's presence and difference of behavior. There are not so many of them that they are not aware of the stranger in their midst. Like God, the boatswain summons him, "Get up!" Meaning, "Wake up, man, join the others! At least pray. Take some care for the lives of other people!" Jonah has isolated himself. He has left his own home and city, abandoned his friends, escaped from his own native place, cut himself off from his religion, set out to go as far away as he can get from home, going the opposite way from the task God wanted to give him. Who is responsible for bringing this evil upon us?

Jonah apparently doesn't bother to pray to his God for deliverance, even when he is asked by non-Jews, and even when he is encouraged to practice his own religion, even when he is not persecuted. He is not prevented by anti-semitic prejudice, or denied the freedom to worship openly. His non-caring disengagement, his passivity and resistance to feeling any emotion must enrage and surprise the other sailors. For a number of reasons, he falls under suspicion.

The evil of the storm, and the threat to their lives must have been caused by someone in their midst. It is a primitive instinct to seek someone out, to conduct a witch-hunt, driven by suspicion and belief in irrational cause-effect dynamics that some powerful force of justice governs the universe. Evil in the world, the affliction that comes upon good people, is traceable directly to the actions of an evil person. The deviance and violation by a single person

can bring calamity on all humanity. The sailors must have felt confident in their own good character and their solidarity as human beings supporting each other—but it is someone in particular who has broken the chain that links them to their gods. The sailors have a cosmology and theology. If evil happens in the world, a human being is responsible for it. Not all humanity in general, not a group. A particular person. It must be a terrifying moment of confrontation when the lot falls on Jonah.

Lots are supposed to be the determination of a question through chance. But the sailors' superstition extends to discovering the truth by letting the gods indicate the source of the problem. They have no evidence, only that Jonah behaves so differently from other men, that his deviance raises suspicion. Who knows who shorted the stick that Jonah drew, in what form the lots were "drawn," or the game rigged? The natural suspicion and resentment against the stranger going to Tarshish with them, who didn't speak their language or join them in their work, could have been expressed in the indictment of

**Jonah conducting a trial in the middle of a storm:
Interrogation about personal identity.**

**Who is responsible
for bringing this evil
upon us?**

So now that there is reasonable suspicion Jonah is somehow to blame for the threat to the sailors' lives and the possible destruction of the ship, the sailors subject him to an interrogation. This has the feel of a courtroom, and it is bizarre. In the midst of the storm, the sailors stop what they are doing to conduct an investigation. They demand that he reveal himself. Up to now, Jonah was the anonymous man who had paid his fare, come on board, and gone below deck to sleep. But now he must

come up from below and make a full disclosure of himself. He is required to wake up, face the storm, and answer the question about who he is. He cannot take refuge anymore in anonymity, hiddenness, namelessness, wordlessness and disengagement. The questions address Jonah's identity:

What is your business? Where do you come from? What is your country? What is your nationality? The last three questions seem redundant. They seem a parody of the four questions posed by the youngest child on the night of Passover at the Seder.

Jonah has been outed, and cannot hide out from people anymore. He has to face up to the consequences, not just of trying to run away from God, but of running out on his faith, his family, his country, the community of his neighbors and friends, his nation and his roots. He has been found out. He has tried to escape to a foreign country, to uproot himself, and deny his own history. Tarshish refers to a foreign country, and some scholars propose that is on the coast of Spain. He is choosing to expatriate himself rather than sustain a dialogue with God. He is not being persecuted or driven out; he is acting as if God's summons to him is an act of persecution, a pogrom from which he is determined to flee. It's the very opposite sentiment that Abraham had in obedience to the summons of God in Genesis 12: "Go forth from your native place to a land I will show you, and I will make you a great nation."

Jonah has followed his own way, and set out in a direction that was escape, the furthest he can get from God and everything he has known and been in his past.

(5) Reflection on My identity as a Woman

If women explore their sense of personal identity using this interrogation, the first question has to do with your life: What is your business? This is to say, What are you doing with your time, your energy, your gifts, your education, your experience, your original hopes and dreams for the future? What is it that you are doing with other people? What is your connection with them? What is the benefit you give and receive from them? Jonah must have said, "I work for God, and have not been doing what he asked me to do, and in fact escaped." So Jonah must make a confession to them, not of his good deeds, but of his failure to do what God wanted. When he was asked about his business by fellow human beings, he confessed.

But "your business" is not just the trade you practice or the credentials you have. It refers to your personal mission, your own work, the vocation to accomplish something that is entrusted to you, that if you don't do it, it won't be done.

For women religious, we have typically identified our business as our ministry, and in the years prior to Vatican II, and the decade after, our ministries were assigned. It wasn't really "your business," but the community's mission, the community's needs, the community's apostolate. So with Jonah, we try to answer the question, What is your business? Where are you from, what country, what nationality?

The second, third and fourth questions seem to be repetitious, but are actually discrete, personal refinements of identity. Where I was born may be different from what country I live in, and my nationality and language. Who is a Jew? Who is a woman? Who am I, if I begin to untie the individual strands that are wound together?

It's the complexity of having layers to who you are. If you are born one place, live in another, and claim an ethnic identity that is distinct from

where you actually live, this means you may not feel you “fit in.” You have a foot in two or three different worlds, and feel you are neither fully in one or the other. You have to share yourself, but each time you leave one territory, you have to adapt to the new, and when you return to the culture of origin, you aren’t who you were when you left. But who you are is the foundation of your being in the world. You are not anonymous, nameless, origin-less, without a history. This set of questions is important in helping refine our sense of identity as women, and as women religious.

For women generally, the identity question doesn’t always break through the surface of their conversations with one another. They are the daughter of someone. They are the sister of someone. They are the wife of someone. They are the mother of children. They have these grandchildren who are the children of particular children. Women’s identity can be limited to their social role in relation to a parent, a husband, a sibling or a child. They belong to this or that denomination, this political party, this service organization. They worked for this company and volunteered for that national or international project.

Where do women reflect on the underlying mystery, This is who I am as a woman, a person? I remember a mid-life woman who made a woman’s retreat I was co-leading decades ago. She had twelve children, she said. Why was she interested in this retreat? To learn something about her sexuality, she said. She thus expressed a truth about women—she can be so completely involved in her everyday role of being a wife and being a mother, but not have given any thought to who she is as a sexual being, a person who is aware of herself and defining herself, not by her biological destiny or her family role, but by her consciousness of how she is understanding herself and choosing to be a woman, an unfolding revelation about herself that is bubbling up from the depths of own spirit and mind and soul.

Women religious were trained in formation not to talk about themselves, and this resulted in a veil covering their individuality. The silence about who we were made us identify with our ministry, our community membership, our charism, our mission. But we ourselves, as individuals, had no story to tell, no personal thoughts to assert, no individual identity. We confessed our individual sins to a priest. We discussed our spiritual life with a retreat director or a spiritual director. We talked about our personal problems with a therapist. But these were private dimensions of the self.

Silence about our personal story helped avoid class divisions, or the appearance of them. We thus, in community life, had no distinctive personal history, no family distinctions, no special social or economic class to distinguish us from other members of the congregation. Our identity was understood to be equivalent to “being in Mercy” where all distinctions merged into a unity that was the fruit of suppression of individual expression. If you had thoughts, you kept them to yourself. The Jubilee booklet is a good example of suppression of individuality. In most cases, the expression of gratitude for being a Sister of Mercy is interchangeable with most other Jubilarians. In very few cases could a 250 word entry have been written by that one individual sister.

Spirituality books after Vatican II stressed the “you” of each person, to distinguish “you” from “us” and “them.” However, the spirituality of religious life presumed homogeneity of identity. We remember the group photographs of sisters sitting in rows, wearing the same habits and veils, in identical postures. Community absorbed and erased individual identity into a collective expression of membership as the equivalent of vocation. While there is a plethora of books about cross-cultural identity, and the immigrant experience, this body of literature has not impacted literature about the spirituality of

women religious who enter a north American community but have a cultural or ethnic heritage that is not Caucasian.

So the questions put to Jonah are significant for recognizing the diversity of women in religious life, and the multi-culturalism of sisters who take on community identity. Diversity is a fact, not just of political opinion or views of theology, but of the individual history of members who belong to the community. This diversity must be revived and re-integrated into the dynamics what community is, if religious life is to have a future. This is because new members will not be drawn from the pool of where the older membership came from. If the vocations of potential new members are to be recognized, the present membership must identify and honor its own diversity. Otherwise, the present membership won't be able to recognize and affirm the vocations of women who don't fit a profile they are familiar with, such as entering at 18, or from a congregation-sponsored high school.

Even if we are U.S. citizens, we were not all born in the same country. The one before WW II is not the same as the one after WW II. The one before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is not the same country as after the Civil Rights Act, which redefined the status and rights of women. "Where do come from?" is a profound question of history. What is the historical period that defines your birth, your parents' birth, your grandparents and great-grandparents' experience? What is your genealogy? How do you explain your characteristics of personality, your talents, your proclivities, your likes and dislikes, your political leanings, your professional leanings, what you chose to do as ministry?

What of your culture? What do you know or not know of its place in the history of the world? How does that matter to your religious life? Are you "in" or "out" because of your cultural heritage? How do

you believe you are seen? What language do you speak that the majority does not understand? Are you first a religious, and then a person, or the reverse? What characteristics of your culture, your ethnicity, your parents' language, do you embrace? What do you reject? What do you acknowledge is the story of your origins, but haven't reflected on?

What difference does your citizenship make? Is it a matter of any consequence that you are a citizen of the United States? What great heritage, freedom and destiny do you feel? Or does your nationality play no part in your self-understanding? Does "leaving the world" mean your nationality is irrelevant? Could you do the ministry that you do without being a citizen?

What solidarity do you feel with women, since you were born one, and not a man? What are the ways you experience and express your citizenship? What is the origin of your faith --from your family, from your culture, or from your Personal conversion?

Jonah's answer to the sailors and their reaction

Jonah answers the "four questions" with two statements: "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." In other words, his business, his country, and his nationality don't explain who he is. Rather, he names himself by his ethnicity—he is Jewish. He also identifies himself by his religion—he worships God who made the heavens and the earth. His God is the God of Genesis.

The reaction of the non-Jewish sailors is awe and reverence. Jonah has tried to run away from this God, but even gentile, heathen sailors who worship other gods recognize the power of Jonah's God. They are the ones to reproach him, "What have you done?" They are the ones to call Jonah to repentance and conversion of heart—

which means consciousness of the inter-relational, as well as cosmic effects of his moral choices. They recognize that Jonah's attempt to escape from God is somehow tied to the storm that threatens their own lives. The sailors, in a fit of animistic superstition consider human sacrifice as the only way they will be saved from the problem Jonah has created for them. "What are we to do with you, to make the sea grow calm for us?"

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They must recognize that Jonah is doing nothing, and will do nothing—not even pray to his God to calm the storm. They will have to do something themselves to Jonah. Such is Jonah's passive aggression, his refusal to do anything to assist his fellow human beings, that they are driven to take hold of him as the embodiment of the environmental crisis that threatens their lives. They have to do something with him. He is like toxic waste that must be purged. The sailors are like a family who must deal with the member who is so hopelessly addicted, so far gone, so alienated emotionally, so defended intellectually from contact or connection, that the healthy and concerned members must stage an intervention to deal with the crisis the drug abuser has created for the whole family. The problem must be solved

because the deviance of one threatens the stability and health of everyone else.

Take me and throw me into the sea

Jonah, in a dramatic act of hubris, says, "Throw me into the sea." Is it recognition of his fault and now his repentance, expressed in a grand gesture of self-sacrifice? Confronted and challenged, he suddenly finds himself engaged with the sailors as other human beings. Still, he won't pray to his God, even though he acknowledged himself as a worshipper of God. What is his reluctance to turn to God? Why has he hardened his heart? Why his refusal to utter one word of prayer to God? It seems he would rather give an order to the sailors for his own self-destruction than open his lips in prayer, or turn his face toward God. "Take me and throw me into the sea, and then it will grow calm for you."

Is Jonah the willing scapegoat? Does he present himself as a sacrificial offering, finally caring more about the lives of the sailors than his own life? Or is he so obtuse that he would rather be thrown into the sea, and that be the occasion of calming it, rather than simply asking God to calm the sea? Nothing will force him to pray. He would rather be dead. He would rather be killed than have to pray. He would rather die than carry out a mission that he doesn't want to perform. The scene seems an allusion to the Akedah, where Abraham means to sacrifice Isaac, but it's hard to imagine that Isaac would willingly ask his father to kill him. Isaac doesn't relieve Abraham's anxiety to please God. In the Genesis story, there is no word from Isaac expressing his willingness to be slaughtered like an animal at his father's hand. He doesn't say, "Father, take the knife and cut my throat."

Jonah, however, demands to be killed: "Throw me into the sea. I can see it is my fault that this violent storm has happened to you." It's suicidal

on one hand. On the other, he is inventing a form of divine justice, that he deserves to die for being disobedient to God. Does he accept the "last judgment" of gentile sailors that he has been unfaithful to his God, and that unfaithfulness has resulted in life-threatening danger to them? Does he demand the death penalty, like a self-confessed serial killer?

The sailors try to avoid inflicting this ultimate sentence. They row very hard to reach shore. They try to save themselves from putting Jonah to death. He himself makes no appeal. He is ready to end his own life, and justify it as deserved, even though the sailors have not yet lost their lives. He has not killed anyone. So why does he impose the death penalty on himself?

We might consider Jonah's depression and despair. Without a relationship with God, his life might as well be over and done with. His determination to die right now, his abandonment of the will to live, contrasts with the heathen sailors. Their will to live takes the form of desperately rowing trying to reach shore. Their sail will not carry them. The sea is rough. The wind blows against them. But they take to their oars together and try to get themselves out of their trouble, along with Jonah, who persists in his death wish. They don't want to inflict on Jonah the ultimate sentence.

There is no sign from Jonah of encouragement, affirmation or acknowledgment. He does not take inspiration for his own life from their human effort.

Jonah's demand to be thrown into the sea can also be read as a comic, extreme reaction of the spiritually resistant ex-believer. Jonah is not just bored with prayer, tired of prayer, unable to think of a prayer. He simply won't. He's fed up. His spiritual life is frozen. Even when offered the model of pagan sailors praying to false gods, he won't utter one word of prayer

to YHWH. Even when the sailors cry out to Jonah's God, "Oh YHWH, do not let us perish for taking this man's life," and express remorse for sacrificing Jonah, Jonah won't pray for himself.

He won't pray for the sailors, or second their prayer with his own. No word even of, "Lord, hear their prayer."

He won't do what soldiers in foxholes do— make a vow that if he is saved he will do something to show his gratitude to God. Has his obtuseness hardened him so deeply that he resists his own instinct of self-preservation and won't even cry out to God? Even as he is being thrown into the sea, he refuses to utter a word of petition, or a prayer for rescue.

When the sea suddenly grows calm, it is the pagan sailors who are overcome with emotion, and converted to faith in Jonah's God. They begin to act like pious Jews. They act with reverence toward God, and like Jews in the Temple, they offer a sacrifice to God, and make vows inspired by their gratitude and devotion.

(6) Reflection on Women's Acts of Self-Sacrifice

This moment in Jonah's life—where he seemingly sacrifices himself willingly—resonates with the self-sacrificing spirit of many women. What is the way women justify the erosion and annihilation of their own life? It is not just the care-taker of an aging parent who falls into this form of self-sacrifice. Women religiously sacrifice themselves for "the good of the church" rather than press a claim for due process in a pastor's arbitrary decision to fire them. They do the same when community leadership treats them unjustly. They buy peace at any cost, no matter how bad the treatment they suffer. They utter no protest, say no word on their own behalf. They put their voice to death. "Throw me into the sea," is a way of saying, "I am willing to be made the scapegoat,

and blamed for your problems. Let my annihilation as a person solve the problem you have.”

Like Jonah, they accept a script that somehow they are to blame for some parish problem, some community problem. “Throw me into the sea.” They would rather die than raise a defense of their good name. They would rather die than come to the defense of another member. They make no petition to God, to their superiors, to parishioners, or to a legal advocate for help. They would rather be thrown into the sea than seek another solution. Women can accept the script that they should sacrifice themselves and be thrown into the sea. It’s a fatalism that is not very attractive to prospective new members. Is this what serving God requires of women religious, that they should adopt this mindset of superstitious, animistic belief? Do women question the script written for them, accept a judgment that they be annihilated, and collaborate in their own self-destruction?

Why didn’t Jonah pray, protest to God, or even encourage the sailors to try to save him? No. Once he said, “Throw me into the sea,” he was absolute. He would accept no help from anyone, nor ask for help, even from God.

After all the chaos of the storm, the interrogation, the condemnation by the sailors, and his acceptance of responsibility, Jonah accepts his rejection. On the other hand, he didn’t dive into the sea himself. He is thrown overboard by the sailors. What are the experiences we have had of being thrown overboard? Do we recall experiences of being victimized, blamed, made the scapegoat, and then willingly or unwillingly sacrificed ourselves because it was the only thing left to do? Jonah remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights

In Genesis, the seas were created on the third day, and the fish of the sea were created on the fifth day, before human beings were created on the sixth. This scene is like creation in reverse. God had arranged that a great fish—a whale—should be there to swallow Jonah. It can be said that the sixth day is absorbed into the fifth and all that is absorbed into the third, implying that Jonah is drawn back toward his origins in the mystery of God’s creation itself.

What is it like for Jonah to be swallowed? His first feeling must be one of separation. He is thrown overboard into the sea, severed from human life, from life as he knows it. He’s thrown into a stormy sea. How far down into the water does he go before the fish opens its mouth and takes him in? How long does it take for him to realize the storm is over? Or does what is “above” cease to concern him, now that his world has dramatically changed. It’s another kind of unconsciousness, or a descent into a deep dimension of awareness where his being is cut off from those “above.” Does he immediately feel rescued or does he feel trapped? In either case, he has lost control over his own life. The normal process of nature is suspended. Jonah does not die. Nor is he digested after being swallowed. He is neither dead, nor does he live the way he has experienced life before. Those who have lived with a terminal illness may find resonance with Jonah’s experience at this point.

**Jonah remained in the belly
of the fish for three days
and three nights**

He doesn’t go anywhere but where the whale goes. Like a child in the womb, he is carried by a greater life than his. He must hear a heart-beat of the whale, sensing it is life. Does he hear his own heartbeat throbbing in rhythm? He must feel the absorption of oxygen. He draws air and nourishment somehow from

inside the whale. The belly of the whale is like a womb. It is utterly dark, soft, enveloping him. Is it female energy that has swallowed Jonah? The chaotic sea is an image of the feminine. The dark is associated with the feminine. The whale is a mammal, and perhaps recognizes Jonah as "one of her own." Does the whale out of compassion keep him safe inside her, like a mother carrying a child?

It is both an unnatural and a natural environment. He should be dead, but he is alive within a living creature, moving within the deep water, being carried silently and without any knowledge of where it is going. A tunnel without any light at the end. Does he sense movement? Can he hear sound? He is in the dark, helpless, enclosed, uncertain. Being swallowed, finding himself inside a whale which is swimming, rising for air and descending into the deep waters of the ocean—no better of image of having disappeared, hiding out, being a recluse, or having erased oneself from public notice can be expressed.

The "dark night of the soul" can be imagined this way, too. You have fallen so far outside of the safe circle of human life, you cannot retrieve it or get back to it. You are so powerless there is no way for you to imagine your escape from where you are. You are so far from God, the divine compassion cannot be imagined or felt. Moving in the dark, through complete darkness, you are without light, without direction, on the brink of extinction. Those who suffer bouts of depression understand Jonah's suffering.

Three days and three nights are time measured by the account of creation...morning and evening, the first day; morning and evening, the second day; morning and evening, the third day. It is not a calendar Jonah can count or one the whale controls. The belly of the whale is where Jonah loses a sense of time. It is not enough time

for gestation—but it is enough time to pass from loss of life to recovery of life.

A prayer of rebirth uttered in the dark

From the belly of the whale, Jonah improbably finds his voice and begins to pray. How long does it take him to compose this prayer? It has an odd quality, placed within the very period of Jonah's confinement, but prayed as though Jonah is looking back on his past experience and expressing gratitude. The prayer expresses the rebirth of his soul. The rebirth takes the form of a recitation of his relationship with God, his relationship to his humanity, his relationship to the created world, and an awakening of his self-understanding. Jonah's prayer tells what it felt like to be separated from God and then to be reunited.

The first part of his psalm rehearses his terrible emotional distress. We have not heard any evidence that Jonah cried out to God until now. But finally we hear his confession that indeed he was praying in the midst of his spiraling down and loss. He was drowning in a deep, bottomless sea. But he knew that God was present to him. He felt cut off from God, but he knew even in the midst of that confusion that God heard him. No distance, no darkness, no depth, no watery chaos, no tsunami or flood could keep his prayer from being heard by God.

In his desperation, he recovers his longing for the central symbols of his faith—summed up by the Temple—and its comforting assurance of God's holiness. He feels a desire to return to his religion, a longing born of his despair at losing it. He was losing his grip on the faith he once had, as he felt himself losing his grip on his sanity and balance. He felt enmeshed by seaweed in his hair, under the seaweed itself, unable to keep

himself alive so submerged was he under the flood of his feelings, his depression, the pressures which were overwhelming him, and the responsibilities that were overcoming his ability to cope. He felt he had been pressed down deeper than the bottom of the ocean, deeper than where seaweed itself was rooted. He felt the emptiness of his life—the entangling abyss—and no way out of the dark vacuum of emptiness and darkness.

Was it also an intellectual crisis that results in a new way of describing who he is? He found himself at “the roots of the mountains.” He had to start all over from the beginning, as though he was learning who he was, how the world was made, what his place in it was, and on what foundations everything he thought he knew was based. Who does he understand himself to be—an individual unique and alone in the universe? What perspective transforms him—that in his humanity is he related to the people in all the countries “underneath the earth”? Does he understand himself to be the descendant of the peoples of past generations? Is he the bearer of all that makes us human?

(7) Reflection on Women’s Solidarity with the Cause of Women

Reading Jonah offers women an opportunity to remember their experiences of chaos, uncertainty, being overwhelmed and buried in the darkness of isolation and confusion. It is not a pleasant task to reclaim the experience of depression - from grief, loss, separation, divorce, economic struggle, defamation, job termination, injustice, diagnosis and struggle with major illness, changes in one’s own body chemistry. Women’s suffering counts for less than men’s, and women generally have a higher pain tolerance than men.

At the same time, what I have called a “Mater dolorosa” spirituality makes it difficult for women to resist and fight

against what causes them suffering. This is a reward for remaining in tears like Mary at the foot of the Cross, weeping in grief. It is hard for women to distance themselves from the emotionality of grieving to say, “It happens because of human nature” or “It happens to many women,” or “I am now a statistic.” It’s a spiritual challenge for women not to blame themselves for the sins committed against them. Women are the first to say, “It’s my fault.” They have to be encouraged to react, “I’m mad and won’t take it any more. I am determined to change this.”

Women who are victims of domestic violence have to make ultimate choices: whether or not to leave their home for their safety before it is too late, how to manage their children who may be in school, how to support themselves if they have not worked before, and whether or not to file for divorce and get custody of their children. If they are women of faith, they face the intellectual and emotional conflicts of reconciling what they must do with what they think their faith says they should do. These are women whose lives undergo a revolution. Nothing is what it was before. They are overwhelmed, at sea, in the dark.

Women from the countryside who are abducted and trafficked for sex, women refugees in war-torn countries fleeing across borders, women targeted by soldiers who use gang rape as an instrument of war. Women in emerging societies are typically the gender required to work for no pay, treated as a man’s property, denied control over money and ownership of land, denied the right to vote, not provided an education, required to conceal themselves from public view, confined to second-class status in family, society and faith community, not provided avenues to seek redress for wrongs, and retaliated against when they do.

How many women share the feeling of Jonah:

"You cast me into the abyss, into the heart of the sea, and the flood surrounded me. All our waves, all your billows, washed over me."

On the other hand, I believe the suffering of women because of their gender is different from the circumstances that led to Jonah's alienation from God. I don't think it's typical for women to turn their backs on God and reject a relationship God initiates. Women suffer more from having been sinned against, less from having been violators of God's commands. Women suffer typically from feelings of failure, inadequacy, self-doubt, and wondering if they measure up to institutional standards. They seek cooperative relationships for themselves and their children; they are not typically "go it alone" performers. They do desire approval.

Thus, the reflection of women on Jonah's distress may need qualification. Jonah is a "go it alone" messenger for God; he is noted for sitting down, obtuse refusal to respond to God, a literalist theology (the God of Israel is only in Israel); trying to escape work, like a teenager, by running in the opposite direction so he can't hear God's voice, using his resources to serve a strategy of avoidance, avoiding contact with other people, tuning out from the world around him, separating himself from both God and other people, and his "determined atheism"—his stubborn refusal to pray to God or seek help, even when his life is at risk.

Jonah's prayer from the belly of the whale, however, can inspire empathy for women who feel they have been thrown overboard, or overwhelmed by a tsunami of emotions or responsibilities or blame for others' misdeeds. In centuries past, women who were autonomous in their lives, unpartnered, more creative than their peers, with higher intelligence—or who owned property—were labeled as the cause for the plague, famine or flood, persecuted as witches and put to death.

Jonah's prayer acknowledges what he lets himself feel—finally. Women pray the psalm for women they know who are suffering. Women with a spirit of advocacy are determined to respond to the plight of other women. This is when women, overwhelmed by their suffering because they were born women, can pray as Jonah did, "Out of my distress I cried to God and you answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice." Women religious who read Jonah can renew their solidarity with other women as their sisters, and dedicate their own energies to the cause of women worldwide.

Jonah's rescue and rebirth

Jonah's prayer is extraordinary because he finally cries out a heartfelt psalm of gratitude. Before, he refused to say a word to God, even when he was being thrown overboard. So one way we can understand his transformation is this: He recovers his true humanity and his deepest faith, which were always there, as deep as the roots of the mountains, and as inescapable a part of his being as his genealogical heritage from past generations. He undergoes a profound awakening of his spiritual consciousness in the belly of the whale. It's a form of inner, spiritual birth as an adult. He comes to know things about himself he didn't realize before. His superficiality gives way to a profound awareness of himself and his place in the world. It is a mystical consciousness, his oneness with the earth, and with all the generations which have preceded him.

Jonah's prayer is extraordinary because he finally cries out a heartfelt psalm of gratitude.

When he acknowledges, "You lifted my life from the pit," he is speaking of a rescue, not just from falling and injuring himself, but from death of his soul, extinction of his spirit, loss of his connection to

human history, and alienation from his place in the created world. He had fallen so low, he could not pull himself out from the depths into which he had fallen.

He now affirms his relationship with God as a firm and defined personal relationship, "Lord, my God." The psalm is a rehearsal of his gratitude, an emotion Jonah never expressed before. God has heard Jonah, no matter how great the distance Jonah had created between them. At his call for help, God responded to Jonah, lifted him up, received his prayer, let him return to his faith, and made him feel at ease in entering the Temple and renewing the practice of his faith. Now Jonah will do what the heathen sailors did—he will offer sacrifice and make a vow that he intends to fulfill—acts that express his religious devotion. He's gone through a religious conversion. His feelings about God, his self-knowledge and awareness of himself as a person in the world have all undergone a radical renewal, an openness, a readiness to begin again.

At the completion of the recitation of his psalm, which is recited from the belly of the whale—Jonah returns to the land of the living. God speaks to the whale. The whale does what God commands. The whale coughs him up on the shore. Jonah gets reborn from the belly-womb of the whale onto land. The journey he has undergone has resulted in his re-birth, a spiritual transformation. The psalm is the itinerary for where he has been—to the depths of the sea, to the roots of the mountains, to the origins of human life and the roots of civilization, to his return to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The fable does not state on what shore Jonah is cast. Presumably, he finds himself on his home shores, somewhere near Joppa, where he originally set out to escape God's mission. Externally, he is back where he started, but his internal starting place has radically altered.

(8) Reflection on Survival after Near Destruction

Jonah's deliverance from the belly of the whale can be interpreted as a person's emergence from the "dark night," to use the metaphorical term of John of the Cross. If transformation means something concrete, a woman can offer a working definition of it in her own life. In what experience did she feel swallowed alive, buried so deep no one could hear her or rescue her? How does she describe the miracle or the unusual, unanticipated circumstances that have resulted in her finding herself back on land? For some women, a long experience of depression is the closest thing that corresponds to being trapped in the belly of the whale, and getting back to "normal," the experience of being coughed up on shore. But depression can be understood as merely a general manifestation of the effect of the suffering women undergo. Suffering takes many forms. Helplessness is an essential element. Aspects of my life are not under my control.

So what has that story been in my life, and how did I endure the darkness? What circumstances changed so that I found myself back in the light of day and on firm ground again? What hope can I offer from my own experience to other women who may feel themselves swallowed alive?

Jonah's Successful Mission to Nineveh

When God summons Jonah again to go to Nineveh, he says to give them the same message as he said at the beginning of the story, which is a message about God's disapproval: "Inform them that their wickedness has become known to me." It's a diplomatic message that communicates God's awareness of the Ninevites' sinful conduct. It has the tone of a parent who says to a child, "I have been informed about your behavior at school. What do you have to say for yourself?" It is an

approach that calls the child to responsibility with the knowledge that the parent disapproves bad conduct, but will approve the good conduct that the child is capable of adopting.

However, Jonah, in the first fervor of a convert, of a man reborn to religion, is now full of zeal for God. He has learned a lesson about what happens to people who avoid God's summons. He is not inclined to a diplomatic approach, or a discussion involving moral conduct. He doesn't seem to remember how God rescued him. What his memory is stuck on is the terror of the storm and being swallowed alive by a whale. Instead of a message about God's approachability, he preaches fire and brimstone. He threatens divine punishment and retribution by destruction of the city. "Only forty days more and Nineveh is going to be destroyed." It's a dramatically different message than the one God originally entrusted to him. But God seems to ratify Jonah's approach.

Whatever the message, the Ninevites, from the king to the common people, to the flocks, fast from food and water. Everyone puts on sackcloth, prays to God and repents of the evil they have done. In a dramatic turn-around, God relents and doesn't destroy the city of Nineveh because the people have had a complete change of heart.

Jonah's preaching has had a stunning result. Who could ask for greater success? It's more than any prophet in the Hebrew canon ever reported. They would all be considered failures by comparison with Jonah. None of them—Ezekiel, Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah—ever reported such a complete turn-about of a whole city at their preaching. The normal reaction to these prophet's preaching was resistance, derision, retaliation, disbelief, trivialization, and persecution.

Jonah seems not to have had much of a strategy for his mission to Nineveh. Or he has reduced

the message to one theme. He preaches the imminence of the end of time, and God's destruction of the city. According to Jonah's preaching, God is not merely aware of Nineveh's evil-doing. He has, in effect, already conducted an investigation, found the evidence he needed, reached a conclusion, and imposed the death penalty on the entire city. The time for repentance is over. The evil is too far gone to be reversed. God is going to destroy the city, as he did Sodom and Gomorrah. No conditions, no discussion, no negotiation, no curriculum for reform, no setting of performance goals, no progressive evaluation aimed at rewarding improvement. It's over.

Jonah expresses his authority by the power to impose ultimatums and the power to invoke God's destruction of the city of Nineveh. Jonah's God is the Annihilator. Jonah makes no distinction between the good and the bad. He is an absolutist about his view of Nineveh. This is what happens to evil people and an evil city. He doesn't care what people try to do to reform or repent. It's too late for them all. Abraham bargained with God to spare the city if ten good people could be found. Jonah is not an advocate for anyone in Nineveh. He can't wait for the destruction from on high.

Jonah's absolutism is probably not an effective strategy for maintaining a marriage, parenting, friendship, education of any age group, business dealings or engaging in diplomatic relations with foreign countries.

According to the story Nineveh repents and God, now becoming aware of their efforts to reform, decides not to inflict the disaster that Jonah had threatened. Nineveh is not destroyed.

He doesn't seem to remember how God rescued him. What his memory is stuck on is the terror of the storm and being swallowed alive by a whale.

Chapter 4: Anger at God, Parable of the Shade Plant, and God's Last Word

The conclusion of the book of Jonah is paradoxical, a non-ending if you are looking for a magical deliverance, a personal triumph, or a happy-ever-after-ending. It consists of three scenes. In the first, Jonah is angry at God and dialogues with him. In the second, Jonah breaks off dialogue with God, and sets up his own camp outside Nineveh. Here, God causes a plant to grow up and die which teaches Jonah a lesson without words. In the third scene, God resumes the dialogue Jonah broke off, and he goes on speaking, having the last word.

Jonah's Angry Dialogue with God

What is the outcome of Jonah's successful preaching ministry? Jonah is not pleased at his success, but angry at God, and enraged. It is not a momentary reaction of surprise, but thorough ire and frustration. He now explains why he fled to Tarshish—because God “is a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, relenting from evil.” In other words, Jonah doesn't want a God who is compassionate. He wants a God who is angry, powerful and destructive. Now he says he knew that God wouldn't destroy Nineveh so that's why he fled. It's a silly justification, but Jonah feels he has to explain why he abandoned his earlier mission—it was God's fault, not his.

Jonah is at war with God and with the Ninevites—and with himself - over what theology defines God. He doesn't want to work for a soft, easy-going, giving-in God who relents and forgives evil doers. He wants to work for a tough, no-nonsense God of wrath who strikes down evil absolutely and sends down fire and brimstone to incinerate the enemy. He now

demands that God kill him, just as he said to the sailors, “Throw me overboard.” He would rather be dead than go on living and having to deal with a compassionate God and the survival of the Ninevites.

God tries the gentle approach of a pastoral counselor who acknowledges Jonah's feelings, but invites Jonah to self-reflection. “Have you reason to be angry?”

Jonah Breaks Off Dialogue and Re-locates

Instead of accounting for his emotions, answering God and entering into dialogue, Jonah does what he did before—he gets up and storms off. Earlier in the narrative, when he ignored God and wanted nothing to do with Nineveh, he bought a ticket and boarded a boat west for Tarshish. Now that he actually finds himself in Nineveh after his preaching campaign, where God wanted him to be, he inexplicably abandons the conversation. As before, he uses the tactic to put physical distance between himself and God. He seems to be repeating an old pattern. He does not head west back to Jerusalem, where the story began.

This time his contrariness takes the form of going further east, all the way through Nineveh, leaving the city limits and marching beyond where he was originally sent—outside the city itself. Nineveh was east of Jerusalem and east of Joppa. Now he goes even further east. His journey physically expresses his refusal to dialogue with God. His grateful prayer from the belly of the whale seems to belong to another life-time.

With the hated city in view, Jonah camps out, makes a shelter, and sits down in the shade to see from afar what will happen to the city. This location isn't his home. He didn't adopt a home in the city. His stay is clearly temporary. He puts down no roots. But the real issue seems to a

multiple form of homelessness: He is not at home with himself, at home in Nineveh, satisfied with his mission, or at ease with God. He is full of discontent, and has focused his many discontents on the destruction he hopes will happen to Nineveh.

He wants God to validate his message of terror and destruction. He has dared God to be the God of Jonah, not the God of Abraham, Jacob and Moses—the one who is merciful and compassionate. This is, in a way, a contest in which Jonah is forcing God to do what the preacher wants. He acts out an ultimatum. If God doesn't do what Jonah demands and expects, Jonah will have nothing to do with him. He is determined to see the Ninevites suffer for their misdeeds. Perhaps he is thinking that if God put Jonah, a loyal worshipper, through the trauma of three days and nights inside a whale as corrective for his running away, God should do something dramatic and disciplinary to the heathen Ninevites, by sending down fire from heaven and setting the city ablaze. Jonah wonders about God's fairness. Does God treat evil harshly—as he did in putting Jonah through the trauma in the whale's belly?

Jonah has yet to reflect on what his own conversion involved. God would not carry out Jonah's death-wish to be thrown overboard, and he won't kill Jonah now. Jonah seems to have forgotten his own prayer of gratitude and embrace his relationship with a rescuing God. How could he possibly forget? Thus, Jonah's peace of mind involves remembering his own experience. What if he recited his psalm again now?

God provides a more subtle message to Jonah. Nothing happens to the Ninevites. Jonah is left to contemplate what doesn't happen to the Ninevites and why it doesn't happen.

Parable of the Shade Plant

God causes a plant with big leaves to grow up and shade Jonah from the harsh sun, as he sits by his lean-to, waiting vengefully for God to destroy Nineveh. Jonah seems overcome by his own pout, despite the fact that he has recently admitted that God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, rich in clemency, loathe to punish."

God creates a quick growing shade plant for Jonah's comfort, and then destroys it the next day. Jonah enjoys the comfort of the shade which relieves him from every distress, but then the next day suffers the capriciousness of a change of weather. He gets hot from the sun and desert wind, and physically faint. He feels good one day, and bad the next. Up one day, down the next. His emotions seemed determined by what pleases him physically or displeases him physically. He is living at a very low level of human consciousness. When he is physically uncomfortable, he doesn't want to live anymore. "I would be better off dead than alive."

**Women's theology naturally turns
to a theology and spirituality
of God's compassion.
We don't have an issue with
speaking for a God of kindness,
forbearance and forgiveness.**

The life and death of the shade plant is an example of a nature parable. It can have many meanings for the reader. What does it mean for Jonah? This is a small trivial matter—whether a plant grows or dies. But Jonah invests it with the same ultimate demand as earlier in the story. To deal with the storm, after his identity and conduct was discovered by the sailors, he

ordered them to throw him into the sea; he was willing to die (2:12). After the success of his preaching in Nineveh, he wants the Lord to take his life, for he would rather die than live if he has to deal with a theology of compassion (4:3). When the plant that shaded him withers, and he gets physically uncomfortable, he asks for death, "I would be better off dead than alive." (4:8). The reader laughs at Jonah's petulance and silliness. A withered plant is reason enough to die?

The sub-text is really a foundational question about a person's philosophy of life: What does Jonah have to live for, beyond victory over his enemies, and maintaining his physical comfort and sense of well-being?

God's Last Word

The last two verses of the story show several effects of the transformation in Jonah's life. First, he finds himself in dialogue with God, when before, he had run away and avoided conversation. Now he is ready to be present to God. God asks him yet again, to be honest and forthright about the reasons for his anger. "Have you reason to be angry over the plant?" This time, Jonah doesn't break off God's attempt at dialogue with him. He answers and admits his rage, "Angry enough to die." He then stays and waits to hear God's instruction and receive his consolation. God's wisdom finally breaks through Jonah's irrationality.

Second, he has let God come to him, not in a moment of dramatic need, as his rescuer from death, but in his everyday, all-too-human state of unsettledness, emotional petulance, and physical discomfort. He doesn't try to be somewhere else than where he is right now. Jonah lets God be with him in the confusion of his contradictory emotions of having nothing to

do anymore. He doesn't even have control over the life of a plant—how useless that must feel. But Jonah is not ashamed. He has made a forthright admission of his anger. He has not dissembled before God. Now he gets to know the "everyday God" who does not leave him, but goes on speaking to him, as though comforting a friend in distress. He has discovered something different about God. This is not only the God for Nineveh, who is "gracious and merciful...slow to anger, rich in clemency, loathe to punish." It is Jonah's own God, who has not punished him, despite his disobedience, but remains with him.

Third, Jonah stops objecting to the fact that Nineveh was not destroyed after its conversion. He doesn't bring up the subject of the storm at sea, his heroic spirit of self-sacrifice, the tribulations he suffered making a journey to Tarshish or his prophetic evangelism of wicked Nineveh. He doesn't recount the trauma of his imprisonment inside the whale's belly. He doesn't recite a grand psalm or repeat his soliloquy of gratitude to God. He stops issuing ultimatums. He stops grand-standing. He stops being a drama queen. He listens to God, as though to a friend sitting next to him on the ridge overlooking the city, both of them looking in the same direction.

Fourth, Jonah hears God speaking in ordinary time about simple everyday facts of life, about a plant that grows and a plant that withers. He entertains God's "small talk" about things that aren't all that important, compared with whales that cough up entrapped prophets, and huge metropolises that must be threatened with hell-fire and damnation. We can hear God and Jonah engaged in chit-chat, talking about the difference between yesterday and today, how the plants are doing in the heat, and the misery created by a hot wind off the desert. God seems to tone down Jonah's moral outrage against the immorality and godlessness of Nineveh. God doesn't seem to look on the Ninevites as ferocious enemies

deserving of retribution once they are defeated through conversion. When God thinks about the Ninevites, it's not about their moral corruption, but their human frailty and ignorance. They don't know the difference between their left and their right hand. It is such pitiable, fundamental ignorance, that God casts the Ninevites as retarded ignoramuses, too stupid to disrupt the social order and too effete to inflict actual damage on anyone. This is just the way they are.

Finally, this is a God who continues with his instruction of Jonah—and the reader—in ordinary time, within the emotions of the moment, with gentle divine persuasion to take the kind and tolerant view of life, even the view of one's former enemies. Jonah has found himself in the place where wisdom arises, but not as a grand revelation from Sinai accompanied by earthquake and fire. This later wisdom comes from hearing God's continuous instruction, close at hand, almost casually, addressed to him personally, in the here and now, as though one neighbor is commenting to the other across the fence about the view that lies in front of them both. This wise perspective on reality is the worldview of a transformed Jonah

(9) Reflection on the Changes for the Better that You Recognize in Yourself

There are several points in the story where Jonah might have said, "I've changed for the better."

- After he was coughed up on shore from the belly of the whale, he might have said, "I learned to see the power of God and my psalm is proof of how my relationship with God was transformed. Once I ran away from God's invitation. Now I'm profoundly grateful for the way I've been rescued. I have a better prayer life now."

- After he had a successful mission in preaching repentance to Nineveh, he might have said, "I felt my personal power and a sense of purpose in life. When I was obedient to God's call, my mission was a success. Before, I used to feel useless and anonymous. Now I enjoy feeling as though I made a difference."
- After he faced frustration, that God didn't punish Nineveh by destroying it, he might have said, "I never really faced my deep rage before. Whenever I got angry or upset, I used to ignore my feelings, endure my depression, and hide my true emotions from others. Now I realize that God is with me where I am, no matter what mood I'm in. I don't have to pretend I'm happy if I'm not."
- After God instructed him about the growth and death of plants, and talked about the Ninevites as a retarded rather than evil people, Jonah might have said, "I used to put energy into grudges and a desire for retaliation. Now, I feel I am in a calmer state of mind and heart. I look on the ordinary things of life with a kinder, more tolerant view. I am happier now than I used to be earlier in my life, and I understand why."

How would you describe some aspect of transformation in your own life?



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