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During the Year of Consecrated Life 2015-2016

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

This issue, “During the Year of Consecrated Life,” coincides, not only with the papal dedication of 2014-2015 to this theme, but with the exoneration-affirmation-appreciation of U.S. women religious in the Vatican’s “report” concluding the contentious period of the Visitation, 2009-2014. The Year of Religious Life has a special resonance when seen through the eyes of U.S. sisters. The Visitation was announced in 2009, under the pontificate of Benedict XVI, by Cardinal Franc Rodé of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

We can wonder whether a positive conclusion to the Visitation in late 2014 would have been achieved without several changes of personnel at CICLSAL. Would such a conclusion have been reached without the election of Cardinal Bergoglio of Argentina as Pope Francis I, and a shake-up of the Curia and several other dicasteries? Without a shift in ecclesial preoccupations—from doctrinal lock-step to a focus on the Church’s mandate to minister to the poor? Without a dramatic shift of metaphors—the world imagined by Pope Francis as a “field hospital” where binding up of human wounds, not doctrinal catechesis, is the first priority?

Religious life in the universal Church is far broader than the American experience, or the experience of women’s congregations alone. It is out of this broader perspective that the articles in this issue are offered.

Marilyn King, R.S.M., having followed the teaching of Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M, noted U.S. authority on the theology of religious life, asks, “Are We Fascinating?” By this, Marilyn refers to the permanence of the “lifeform” of religious life—it has a permanent character in and of itself, despite ups and downs in number of members. The “fascinating” aspect of religious life is its potential to both attract and challenge people. So the title is a query—are we living religious life in a way that attracts and challenges those who recognize we are religious, even though we don’t wear a traditional habit? What are the essential counter-cultural aspects of the vows?

Barbara Moran, R.S.M., offers a review of Sandra Schneiders’ last volume in her trilogy on religious life, *Buying the Field*. Barbara focuses on a central theme: changes in the understanding of the vow of obedience, much more substantive than alterations of the dress code. She discusses Schneiders’ reflections on obedience. Then she sets up a contrast: between provisions on that vow in the Original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy emphasizing submission to the superior, and today’s articulation on obedience in the Constitutions, where dialogue, mutuality and relationship are the focus.

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M., undertakes to place religious life in another conversational context—that of Pope Francis who is a Jesuit, in dialogue with his provincial and members of the Society of Jesus in defining their congregational mission to the poor. His own vision has been forged by work with leaders of men’s religious communities in South America. His personal instinct is to foster a dynamic view of religious life, which was found in post-Vatican II documents. A contrast of his orientation with a static view of the church is one factor explaining the tension between some bishops and U.S. women religious.

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (West Midwest) turns to the Original Rule, and reviews the stories of saints we may have forgotten—the ones whom Catherine McAuley named as patrons for her sisters, particularly John of God, Catherine of Genoa, and Catherine of Siena. She treats the hidden contribution of Francis de Sales, and cites the saints added later by a Roman editor. What the saints have in common, the ones Catherine named, is their healing ministry and service to the poor and the sick, their going out into the streets, and their integration of contemplation and action.

Michelle Gorman, R.S.M. (West Midwest) with a background in teaching, vocation work and congregational leadership, has recently been appointed as Chaplain to the Senate of the State of California. Michelle's pastoral role is to compose and open sessions with a prayer for a multi-denominational and multi-faith elected body of civic representatives. The grounds of the Capitol building stand on land that was originally purchased by Mother Baptist Russell for the Sisters of Mercy; it was later appropriated by the State of California. Could the foundress of the San Francisco congregation have foreseen this unusual public role for a Sister of Mercy?

Norita Cooney, R.S.M. (West Midwest), President of the first West Midwest leadership team, died in office in 2011. This article was the text of her Convocation address to Sisters of Mercy of Burlingame in 1984. She uses Scripture, literature and personal experience to outline the elements of an apostolic spirituality that acknowledges difficulties with the institutional church. Because of its resonance with our discussions on religious life decades later, it is included in the section of *MAST Journal* called "Wisdom That Endures."

While these articles were not part of official reports to CICLSAL during the Visitation of U.S. women religious, they stand as a memorial to the God-language of women of Mercy before, during and after the official inquiry. These essays represent the self-understanding of women religious and answer those who ask: How is your vowed life faithful to the gospel? What inspires your ministry? What is your relation to the Church?

One purpose of *The MAST Journal* is to provide a forum for just this sort of theological dialogue—by and for women, within the Institute, and within the Church.

Sincerely,

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

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

Are We Fascinating? Religious Life As a Prophetic Life Form

Marilyn King, R.S.M.

Introduction

In Gerhard Lohfink's most recent book, *No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today*, the author poses a question in Chapter 21: "What distinguishes Christianity from [other] religions?"¹ In one aspect of this tradition, redemption takes time.² The reason why it takes time is that the message of redemption is conveyed not so much by authoritative action but by example of life. This distinguishes the Judaeo-Christian belief from other religions.

In his analysis Lohfink compares the Judaeo-Christian understanding of redemption³ to that of a revolutionary stance toward redemption. Revolutionaries seek salvation/freedom by applying rapidly inflicted force. He gives the example of Communists who "openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions."⁴ The new order is brought about by violent suppression of the free choices of those who do not accept the vision of the revolutionaries—immediately.

By contrast, Christian belief holds that salvation is a process that unfolds in history. It began small, with one person. The man Abraham was called to a new way of life, but even in his case, God had to wait on his response. In the Judaeo-Christian story salvation is a call to a relationship. It is initiated by God, who respects the freedom of those involved to choose to be part of it, or not. Thus, the Judaeo-Christian religion began with a call to a way of life that brings true freedom, while respecting the freedom of those called. It is a process that takes time.

Through the fidelity and example of Abraham a new family of God was born. This family grew in numbers and understanding of what belonging to God meant until the final and full word of salvation was uttered in Christ Jesus. From then on, all who heard and then freely uttered the words, "I believe, in a baptismal ritual entered into a community of salvation, the church.

Now, this new people of God does not exist for itself, but for the sake of all people and nations. For that reason, it must be communicated to others so that, in their way of living, others can see that justice, peace and love are possible in this life. Others drawn to this community "can accept the new social order in freedom, simply because they are fascinated by it."⁵

This is how God chose the world to be redeemed—slowly and through the example of those who have heard the call. Salvation comes about not by compulsion, but through fascination with a way of life in this world, which God intended all along, namely, a world living in the Reign of God. It is through the lived example of those who have been saved that intrigues others to ask, "How can I get some of that?"

Religious Life as a Lifeform

In a recent 5-day seminar on religious life in the new millenium⁶ Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M. offered a synthetic description of ministerial religious life. She began her lectures with the following description:

Ministerial Religious Life is a Christian, mystical-prophetic lifeform given to the Church by the Holy Spirit and is constituted by perpetual profession of consecrated celibacy, evangelical

poverty, prophetic obedience lived in transcendent community and ministry.⁷

This description summarized her trilogy on religious life written over the period of thirteen years.⁸

In her writings and in her lectures during this seminar, the term "lifeform" was used consistently to epitomize the fundamental character of religious life. "Lifeform" is not "lifestyle." The

latter is like a collection of parts that do not form a whole.

“Lifeform” is organic—all the parts live and move as one. This is not to say that the lifeform of women religious is rigid, for a lifeform adapts to the changes in its environment, but without losing its identity. The lifeform of religious life is centered and grounded around the message of Christ. It is a lifeform that has existed since the first century of the church, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the church in and to the world. It is a public way of life whose mission is to make visible the redeemed way of life, lived according to the teaching of the gospel of Christ.

What are the forces that lead the people away from the reign of God? Schneiders names these as sex, money, and power. They are the craving for sexual pleasure for itself alone, the urge to acquire things for oneself regardless of the impact on others, and the claim of power over others regardless of the loss of free choice to others.

By contrast, the alternate lifeform of consecrated religious is one that speaks of a permanent commitment to a way of life that expresses and cultivates authentic human relationships in celibacy. It shows a way of possessing things without being possessed by them in poverty. It exemplifies a use of power that serves and listens to others in order to bring about the freedom of the reign of God in obedience.

Schneiders makes clear that the religious lifeform is not a better or more perfect way of life than that of committed baptized laypersons. They, too, by their baptism and their particular vocation in the church, are called to witness in such a way that they are “fascinating” to those who have not heard the gospel. In the early centuries of the church, Tertullian summed up this way of evangelizing by noting that the Romans of his day would exclaim of Christians: “See how they love one another.”

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The charism of religious life is, further, a lifeform that is constituted by living a vowed life in a community. Religious community is unique in that it transcends the usual bonds that hold people together. Religious live in community brought together not by blood or marriage or even friendship. They are united by the call of the Holy Spirit to witness to the gospel through their entire way of life: consecrated celibacy lived in community, evangelical poverty in their handing over of personal possessions for the life and ministry of the whole community, and prophetic obedience in their willingness to share authority and power in community for the purpose of ministry and the realization of the Reign of God.

Visibility

Religious life, therefore, is a lifeform whose charism is to witness to the Reign of God in such a way that it illustrates another way of life different from that of “the world.” It witnesses to ways of relating to others, having possessions, and using power. These touch on impulses that are deep within every human person that can be used or abused. But because the way the vowed religious incarnates the expressions of these impulses--with love, freedom, respect for others--this way of life both fascinates and attracts and challenges. In other words, religious life is prophetic.

But if religious life is supposed to fascinate must it not be seen? How do religious make the Reign of God visible to others by the way they live? The ever-present controversy among religious about the habit touches this question of visibility. Some say this is the way we are noticed. Without the habit how do others know we even exist?

Others say, however, the sight of a nun in a habit often brings forth the caricature of the “Sister-disciplinarian” of a previous generation, or the person who expects respect and a certain kind of behavior from others. Thus, the choice to wear “regular clothes” concretizes Vatican II’s teaching

that the church exists *in* the modern world, not apart from it. Sisters are not higher or better than anyone else.

It is not the purpose of these examples to prove who is right in resolving the habit question. But it does ask the question: How can religious best be identified in our society today? And what do they want to exemplify to others? To make this personal, recall a time when someone has pegged you as a religious. What did they see in you that caused them to know who you were? Was it the caricature of past years, or a behavior that was gospel-like?

Effect of the Apostolic Visitation

More importantly, if religious life as we experience it today does radically change from what it is and religious congregations of today become history, religious life in new forms will come about. When this question of visibility came up at the Sandra Schneiders Seminar, Sandra responded somewhat facetiously that the Vatican's doctrinal assessment of LCWR and apostolic visitation of women's communities in recent years was possibly one of the greatest gifts given religious because it drew attention of the public to the reality of the "new nuns." Religious were seen as women who are not afraid to oppose, stand firmly, but respectfully, in the face of accusations that were neither relevant nor true.

With interest stirred by the Vatican charges, the media began to report on the lifetime commitment and good works of religious. Many people throughout the country came to support religious. This painful incident opened a window of visibility that has left a favorable impression on the public. These women are witnesses to the gospel, dedicated to Christ and to the people of God. In the words of Pope Francis in his exhortation to

religious, these recent difficult experiences have served to "wake up the world."

Religious life ought to promote growth in the Church by way of attraction. The Church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world... [R]eligious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up.⁹

The Numbers Question

The title of Sandra Schneiders' seminar was "Religious Life in the 21st Century." Inevitably, the question of the declining numbers of religious came up in the discussions. Will the increasingly high median age of religious lessen attractiveness of the life? Doesn't that already seem to be happening? Will there even be any religious left at the end of the 21st century to witness by their unique prophetic lifeform?

Sandra responded by making a distinction between "diminishment" and "relinquishment" in connection with the numbers question. She noted that "diminishment" is passive, people just watching it happen. However, "relinquishment" requires an active choice. Thus, even as we age and grow smaller, we have to relinquish certain abilities. This does not mean we cease to be a prophetic lifeform, for it is our lifeform that is prophetic. In religious life we don't age out.¹⁰

More importantly, if religious life as we experience it today does radically change from what it is and religious congregations of today become history, religious life in new forms will come about. Why? Because religious life is a charism of the church. Immediately after one expression has served its purpose in attracting others to the gospel way of life through its charism, new expressions will emerge through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

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It All Takes Time

In the beginning of this essay, I referred to Lohfink's view that Christian salvation takes time because it is spread, not by force, but by word and example—and this is an historical process, not a sudden event. So much has happened in the lives of religious since Vatican II but sometimes the process has seemed to slow down, especially today with resistance from the hierarchy, and with our concern for our aging numbers. We get impatient.

Pope Francis' teaching on the principles of evangelization in *Evangelii gaudium* are helpful in addressing these issues:

- Evangelization takes time.
- In the process of evangelization, differences and conflicts will surface. These must be faced and dealt with in a process of reconciliation.
- The good news is incarnational. It is more about the realities of life than ideas or theories.
- Evangelization is a community effort. Individuals often don't see the results of their own life-witness. But it is necessary to believe that each person contributes to the whole prophetic endeavor.

Moreover, as the title of Francis' apostolic exhortation indicates, the efforts of religious to be faithful to their lifeform, along with its charism and mission, will involve challenging events and issues. Despite difficulties, these efforts should be clothed with joy and assurance of the truth with which we have been entrusted.¹¹ The unique charism of religious calls for lifelong commitment and patient fidelity and open-eyed alertness to the world in which it lives. This way of life is a gift to the church, which will endure.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to a newly published book, *From Teilhard to Omega*,¹² Ilia Delio the editor refers to Ewart Cousins' description of the dawning of a new age of consciousness rising

from mass communications, modern science, and technology. This new age is marked by a consciousness of community and ecological relatedness. "For the first time since the appearance of human life on our planet, all of the tribes, all of the nations, all of the religions are beginning to share a common history." However, this new age is still under construction and the builders are "mutational" persons, those that "think outside the ordinary sequence of events and whose insights can inspire others to think in new ways."

Doesn't it seem apparent that the prophetic lifeform of religious is a resource for such "mutational" persons? Wouldn't that be fascinating? ♦

Endnotes

¹ Gerhard Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today*, trans. Linda Maloney (MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

² In this article the words salvation, freedom, redemption are used interchangeably, though it is recognized that each carries its own nuances theologically.

³ Throughout his works Lohfink emphasizes the relation of Judaism and Christianity as one of promise and fulfillment.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 256.

⁵ Op. cit., p. 258.

⁶ This seminar took place at St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana on July 13-18, 2014.

⁷ This definition was on a handout given at the beginning of her first lecture.

⁸ This trilogy consists of these titles: *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2000); *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy and Community in Catholic Religious Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2001); *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013).

⁹ "Wake Up the World!" Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life," trans. by Donald Maldari, S.J., *La Civiltà cattolica* (2014) I, p. 3.

¹⁰ In an interesting aside, Sandra Schneiders observed that there's need today in religious Communities to describe a new formation period to prepare for the new sociological category emerging--Adulthood II, ages 65-85.

¹¹ Cf. *The Joy of the Gospel*, pars. 222-237. USCCB, 2013.

¹² Ilia Delio, ed., *From Teilhard to Omega: Cocreating an Unfinished Universe* (New York: Orbis Books, 2014): 1.

Buying the Field: A Reflection on Sandra Schneiders' Latest Volume

Barbara Moran, R.S.M.

At long last, Sandra Schneiders' final volume of her well-respected trilogy on Religious Life was published in 2013. Many reviewers give this book, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* high praise, while admitting it requires both careful reading and prayerful consideration. The text is carefully documented with many quotations from Scripture and theology. Though this is not an easy read, it is worthwhile for those willing and able to devote time and intellectual effort to the project.

Divided into three major sections, the volume treats the theological context under consideration, an updated account on evangelical poverty, and—what is basically new material for Schneiders' work on the vows—prophetic obedience. Her conclusion, entitled “Transforming Renewal,” brings this volume to a close, as well as incorporating the major conclusions of her two earlier books on Religious Life. Notes, works cited and a detailed index are covered in the final ninety pages.

For many Religious who made vows prior to Vatican II, perhaps the most noteworthy section is the part on prophetic obedience. Those whose profession dates from more recent years may find some of the changes in her understanding of this vow rather surprising. What is most significant for all readers, however, is the quotation repeated at the beginning of this book:

The Reign of God is like a **TREASURE**
hidden in a field
which a person **FOUND**
and out of joy
SOLD ALL she had
to **BUY THAT FIELD**. (cf. Matt. 13:44)

This is the sentence, which frames all three of Schneiders' volumes on religious life. Most interesting is her use of the final phrase, “Buying the Field,” as the title of this, the third and final book. She refers to the theological context of this work as a “hidden field,” and links it to the meaning of “world” in our 21st century. Members

of religious communities are harvesters, and our task is a mission to this world. The next section of this volume deals with poverty, both as an alternate approach to goods and possession, as well as poverty of spirit in the quest for God.

MAST readers will already be familiar with the thrust taken by Mercy theologians in understanding our world as the primary mission field for the present century. *MAST Journal* Vol.18, No. 1 (2007), entitled *International Research Papers*, includes “Fire Cast on the Earth—Kindling”: Being Mercy in the Twenty-First Century, by Elizabeth M. Davis, R.S.M. Several other articles on current Mercy ministries with this orientation are written by Sisters of Mercy Mary Sullivan, Elaine Wainwright, Margaret Farley, and Patricia Fox. Each Sister shows how the needs of our contemporary world are being met by individual Sisters, as well as Mercy institutions, which carry out the Mercy mission to today's world.

Also familiar to many readers are references to Schneiders' previous volumes, which touch on her definition of evangelical poverty, delineated as the economics of the Reign of God. She describes poverty in biblical and contemporary terms as both non-possession and a spirituality. What she provides in this third volume is primarily an expansion and update as we move into the needs of our own 21st century.

Prophetic Obedience

Especially relevant to today's religious readers is her third volume material on prophetic obedience as it applies to our understanding of authority, the relationship of authority to obedience, making room in the Church for a prophetic vocation, and a unitive discernment in the Quest for God. These are the main subjects that are covered in the next section of *Buying the Field*.

For Schneiders, the vow of obedience is described as “a prophetic enterprise of mediating

the three-pronged encounter of God (mediated through Christian tradition), the People of God (as leaven within the wider human race), and culture (in this time and place.” p. 359) She also refers to the previous discussion of contemporary religious life in her first volume, *Finding the Treasure*.

How this mediation takes place is what she discusses at length in this volume, particularly in Chapter Seven. For the great majority of North American women religious, the first two of these prongs are quite familiar: We made our vows to God, mediated through Jesus Christ and the Church, often described as the People of God, since Vatican II. Yet the importance of culture in this time and place seems newer material for 21st century consideration. Such is the stress on the world today as the focus of prophetic obedience, as suggested by Schneiders.

The term “mediation” may be a new perspective for many Religious who made their vows some years ago.

Who mediates and to whom is another question for many readers. Yet for all religious, relationship to God, to whom we vowed obedience, is all important. What seems problematic is how the Church—hierarchy, canon law, approved Constitutions, congregational superiors—mediate God’s will both yesterday and today.

Obedience Formerly Mediated through Family, Military, Monarchical Structures

Post-Vatican II renewal of religious life, mandated in conciliar documents, seemingly changed the form of Church mediation if not the substance. According to Schneiders, pre-Vatican II models of authority, as observed in religious congregations approved by the Church, were too much like family, military, or monarchical structures. Most canonical congregations of North American women religious women engaged in renewal processes to modify these structures, even though at times Church hierarchy voiced

objections to the changes. Schneiders suggests that the primary challenge to congregations has been the remodeling of religious obedience as discerned by renewal Chapters, and ongoing study by members.

She insists, “There is no doubt that what Religious today mean by obedience is quite different from what most who entered in the pre-conciliar time were taught about the vow” (p. 423). In Chapter Eight she outlines in detail her understanding of prophetic obedience as an alternate approach to freedom and power, as that

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applies to the majority of vowed Religious in 21st century North America. These women no longer consider “blind” obedience a form of virtuous behavior or the object of their vows.

So the question remains. What is the form of obedience being practiced today and what is meant if this obedience is defined as prophetic? For Schneiders this prophetic style also mirrors a prophetic vocation in the 21st century Church.

“Authority and obedience refer not to domination and submission but to the variety of roles and variations in process, interchanging constantly and reciprocally, that interact in the collaborative effort to discern God’s will in community and ministry and to do it faithfully” (p. 507).

Schneiders sees this contemporary witness of religious as a response to the theology of obedience, in terms of mutuality, equality, and freedom in the Church of Jesus Christ. She then discusses this current re-imagining of religious obedience in the quest for God. Discernment and a spirituality of unitive freedom are necessary factors for all Religious who see the will of God in the sanctification of members who desire growth in loving union with the One who loves each one infinitely.

In the final chapter, “Transforming Renewal,” Schneiders traces the past 50 years of religious life in the United States, especially the results of the groundbreaking conciliar document, “The Declaration on Religious Liberty” --on freedom of

conscience. She sees this document in particular as impacting the personal lives of Sisters, "...demanding a new level of moral maturity and responsibility in relation to the official Church, but also their social and political commitments and their ministries in ecclesiastical institutions" (p. 604).

The teaching and practice of Jesus became for many a new model of obedience, prophetic in form, and basic to contemporary religious community and ministry. The ministerial focus has been accompaniment and service of the People of God on their pilgrim way, rather than their association with a mostly hierarchical Church. This shift in focus has resulted in a re-direction of the response of women religious to the call of Jesus to fullness of life, for themselves and those with whom they live and work.

Schneiders insists, "Obedience, then, has to be re-imagined as the commitment to hear and heed all indications and intimations of the will of God, both within and outside the community, as Jesus attended to the One who sent him" (p. 654).

Many North American women religious would agree with this statement of their vowed commitment as seen through a 21st century lens, even though it is not the semi-monastic lifestyle which members of most ministerial communities entered in years prior to Vatican II.

This commitment does presuppose a life based on contemplation, shared prayer and discernment with other members, and continual re-assessment. While many of us are seasoned—even elderly members—great maturity and personal spirituality are required to live this form of religious obedience, both prophetic in aspiration, and demanding in everyday observance. This is the challenge today, and our call to follow Jesus on an ever new and changing path, but always a path to greater love and union with our God to whom we made our vows. This is the approach of most of the contemporary North American communities of women religious.

Authority and Obedience in the Institute Constitutions of Sisters of Mercy

For the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, our current Constitutions describe our understanding of authority in this way:

"Institute Chapters, Community Assemblies, and sisters in positions of governance exercise authority in the Institute according to the universal law of the church and the proper laws of the Institute and each Community" (p. 51).

We describe our vow of obedience as stated in our Mercy Constitutions, "By our practice of obedience we unite ourselves to the obedient Christ whose call and mission led to his death and the redemption of the world. Through this vow we commit ourselves to obey those who exercise legitimate authority according to these Constitutions" (p. 27).

Institute presidents or Community presidents, or their delegates, rarely invoke this vow, which can only be done in the presence of two witnesses, as stated in Canon Law. But what seems a more usual practice for the individual is summarized in the following section of the Mercy Constitutions:

"The spirit of obedience impels us to search together for God's will in fidelity to our mission. Responsible obedience

requires that we inform our minds and prepare our hearts for dialogue, share our insights and respect freedom of conscience. In this search we listen to one another in love and accept conversion to God's will. When the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom and courage to live in this way, we are able to embrace the cross in whatever shape it presents itself in our lives." (p. 28)

While this spirit's been part of Mercy spirituality since our founding, the particulars of daily life in our convents have changed somewhat since the Original Rule was approved over 150 years ago.

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Obedience Described in the Original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy

In the founding document we read that obedience was the principal virtue and basis of daily life lived according to those Constitutions.

“The Sisters are always to bear in mind, that by the Vow of Obedience they have for ever renounced their own will, and resigned it to the direction of their Superiors. They are to obey the Mother Superior as holding her authority from God; rather through love than servile fear, they shall love and respect her as their Mother. . . They shall obey the call of the bell as the voice of God. (Chapter 7th)

In addition to obeying the Superior the Sisters were also required to “be always subject to the authority and jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop, and the Sisters shall respect and obey him as their principal Superior after the Holy See.” (Part Second, Chapter 1st)

Moreover, the bishop could appoint a priest and give him faculties to “duly attend to the government and good order of the Community in spirituals and temporals.” (Part Second, Chapter 1st. This Priest was asked to visit the Convent annually to examine whether the Rule and Constitutions were being exactly observed and each Sister was to appear before him and answer his questions. He could also limit convent expenses if they had exceeded income.

The office of the Mother Superior is also described, and she is called upon “to take care that regular discipline be maintained, that The Rule and Constitutions be strictly observed, and that the Sisters diligently apply to their respective charges and employments.” (Chapter 3rd)

She is also to “tenderly comfort and support the dejected, if there be any such, correct those who transgress and impose such penances as may be judged expedient.” (Chapter 3rd)

Sisters of Mercy who entered the various Mercy communities prior to Vatican II may remember visitations by a priest appointed by the local bishop. We also knew superiors who

exercised their authority in a somewhat motherly fashion, even though Mercy Constitutions were modified, especially after the 1917 Codification of Canon Law. We also had Guides and Customs Books, which kept alive many of the practices outlined in the Original Rule and Constitutions until after the post Vatican II renewal.

Tensions Between Fidelity and Adaptation

Still the question may arise: Has religious obedience withered away in the past fifty years?

As Schneiders reminds her readers, “Obedience, then, has to be reimagined as the commitment to hear and heed all indications and intimations of the will of God, both within and outside the Community, as Jesus attended to the One who sent him” (p. 654).

So for Sisters of Mercy, and the majority of other congregations of women religious, contemplative prayer, retreats, spiritual reading, and sacramental participation are given high priority.

Living community, whether in a group or singly, Sisters meet often for prayer, dialogue, networking, and reassessment of their individual and corporate stances on questions of peace and justice. Each Sister is urged to listen and consider what others have to say and to accept majority decisions. This becomes even more significant during Chapters and Assemblies, which are part of the structure of authority in Mercy communities.

Is life easier than it was fifty years ago? For some of us it was easier when we were just told what to do from the moment we got up at the sound of the bell in the morning, until it was time for the great silence at night. Now we have to pray and carefully consider what our vows and ministry commitments are asking of us. We have to admit when our personal choices may not be the best, and may not be accepted by some of our Sisters. All in all, religious life has always been challenging, and today it requires both maturity and a willingness to admit that we might have made better choices.

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As Schneiders reminds us at the end of *Buying the Field*:

“If consecrated celibacy is the mystical heart of Religious Life as total self-gift to God to the exclusion of any other primary life commitment, then evangelical poverty and prophetic obedience

are the community-structuring dynamics that equip Religious Life for the prophetic ministry that carries Jesus’ mission into the world and that God so loved us as to give the only Son that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life (p.658).” ♦



Reflection by Sister Rosemary Sullivan, R.S.M., former President, Burlingame Regional Community, just before the establishment of the West Midwest Community in 2008

One of the blessing poems by the late Irish author, John O’Donohue ends with the following words: “May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder.”

Let us, for a very few minutes, reflect on the sacredness and giftedness of the days of our past. Today we stand in wonder—in awe—of the strong and courageous days of our pioneer sisters, of the days that followed as a young community, of women moved forward with wisdom and foresight. Some of us here remember the days of our growth and expansion and the respect we earned.

Most of us remember past days that were fragile for us—days of loss—the suffering and death of not only many elderly sisters but also some who were far too young, days when we faced the shifting of our ministries and some very difficult endings, days of tension around the many levels of renewal, days when we sensed a lessening of our perceived prestige, and days of

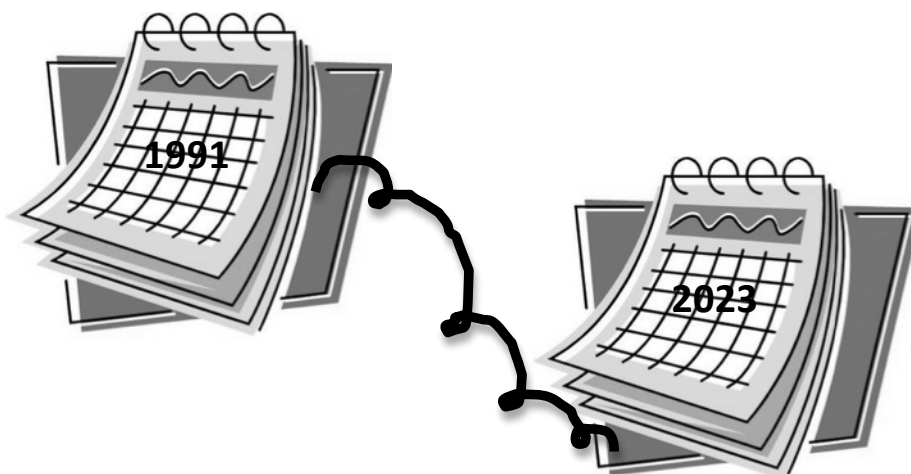
obvious decline in new members.

There were surely days when our times together brought real joy, days when we truly recognized the gifts among us, days when we sensed a growing willingness to be open to the wonder of change.

Each of us stands in the wonder of her own past days—the struggle to know, understand and accept who we were and are—days of clarity and days of uncertainty, days when we felt very much alone and days when we knew we had strong support.

As persons and as community we can stand in awe of our past days together and acknowledge who and what we have become.

On the first day of July a new dimension will be added to our lives. May what we have experienced in the past, what we have learned, what we have loved and lost; move us to greet each new dawn with a deeper and finer sense of wonder. ♦



A Window into Pope Francis' Views on Religious Life

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M.

Introduction

The June 2014 MAST meeting continued its reflection on the documents of Vatican II fifty years after their promulgation and chose to examine the relationship between Francis I's *Wake Up the World*¹ and *Perfectae Caritatis*.² As most MAST readers are already aware, Vatican II's document on religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, enjoyed a thirty-year period of implementation culminating in the Synod on Consecrated Life and its Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*,³ in 1995. *Vita Consecrata* basically endorsed the direction of renewal initiated by *Perfectae Caritatis* and subsequent implementing documents.

A review of the history of the debates at the council itself and the conflict of interpretations over the intentions of the council fathers related to *Perfectae Caritatis* continue to affect us today, most concretely manifested by CDF's Doctrinal Investigation of LCWR which has yet to reach its conclusion. Francis I's views of religious life as reflected in his conversation about religious life with the Union of Superiors General of Religious Men at their Eighty-Second General Assembly, November 27-29, 2013, as well as other statements he made before and after his election to the papacy, clearly show his appropriation of *Perfectae Caritatis* as endorsed by *Vita Consecrata* and his own Jesuit formation and religious life which was deeply influenced by the Society of Jesus's renewal expressed most vividly in their General Congregation 32 and Pedro Arrupe's leadership of the Society as its general, during whose term Bergolio was appointed provincial of Argentina.

Conflicts of Interpretation about the Renewal of Religious Life

Australian theologian, Maryanne Confoy has carefully traced the debates and the reception of *Perfectae Caritatis*, "The Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life," and the two documents on priesthood, *Presbyteriorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*.⁴ She notes how *Perfectae Caritatis* more than some other Vatican II documents encodes within it the conflicts between the traditionalists and the progressives at Vatican II that we as women religious have been living with ever since. In a subsequent essay on religious life in *Theological Studies* in 2013, she identifies the theological conflict related to religious life after Vatican II as "State of Perfection or Living Charism"⁵—a static view of religious life versus a dynamic charismatic understanding that continues to develop and unfold under the Spirit's sway over time.

Confoy describes the situation at Vatican II as a contest between "static versus dynamic" worldviews.

She asserts that the debates at the council on *Perfectae Caritatis* were largely focused on religious life in Europe and America. Religious life in Europe had only partially recovered from two world wars, and it was tightly governed by the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which had the effect of flattening or obscuring the original charisms of many congregations. Confoy recounts a history foreign to many of us about the situation in Europe. Pre-1965 religious life in Europe for women was in "deep decline, nearly dying of hunger, neglect and privation." Simultaneously in the U.S., women religious were struggling with "ever-expanding demands of their ministries ...and the problem of antiquated but romanticized religious habits that not only set them apart from those they ministered to but required hours of time in their laundering and maintenance," as well as other debilitating customs and horarium.⁶

At the same time, religious were exercising major leadership roles in education, healthcare, and community service, but this was before more expansive opportunities for women had become available. Confoy describes the situation at Vatican II as a contest between “static versus dynamic” worldviews.

Recent commentaries on the history of Vatican II describe the general movement through the process of the council as becoming increasingly dynamic as well as pastoral through the five sessions of the council. This clearly became the view of the large majority. These historian commentators note that the council coped with polarization through its entire process. The primary neuralgic polarity was between the extremes of openness or closure to the world.⁷

Confoy also asserts that *Perfectae Caritatis* committee members, Cardinal Suenens, Cardinal Dopfner, and Bishop Huyghe, had argued persuasively for moving beyond a concern with personal salvation to recognizing the foundation of religious vocation as in Christ and in the life of the church. Suenens particularly, envisioned women religious as moving into much needed new ministries in the church and world and recognized they were blocked in their ability to do so because of the accretion of customs, the elaborate habits, and their confinement to the education of children. Suenens rightly saw what would later happen when women religious began to exercise ministries beyond parochial and diocesan institutional confines and began to address previously unmet needs in ecumenism, evangelization, and mission. Confoy identifies opposing *Perfectae Caritatis* committee members, Cardinals Spellman and Ernesto Ruffini, as wedded to maintaining the ministries of religious in their archdioceses. They wanted discipline reinforced along with careful regulation and did not want to lose their workforces. These men characteristically voted with the traditionalist minority throughout the council as well as on this committee.

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These sharp contrasts reflected within *Perfectae Caritatis* itself, and within the committee that wrote the document, continued throughout the post-conciliar years leading to the different trajectories in the U.S. of the Council of the Major Superiors of Women Religious and the LCWR communities who parted company in the early 1990's as a consequence of these conflicting views.⁸

Both papacies after Paul VI until the present remained primarily cautious, especially about women religious. Religious who were clergy were more easily assimilated to the clerical state except for their actual community life and often their missionary zeal. The brothers were left struggling to find a place at all. Conservative Episcopal appointments during these papacies were used as one way of slowing down the renewal of religious life and other Vatican II initiatives right up to the present.

I assume we are going to continue to deal with this polarization for some time to come unless LCWR leadership manages to stay in the dialogue long enough to resolve some of these tensions with their Roman and American Episcopal supervisors. This may yet be possible with Francis embodying a Gospel-centered, evangelical and relational way of being church in the world.⁹

Identity of Women Religious

Perfectae Caritatis depends on *Lumen Gentium*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Dignitatis Humanae*, as well as the other documents of Vatican II for its deeper theological interpretation; it was implemented through a series of documents up through the 1995 Synod of Religious Life and its document, *Consecrata Vita*. A contextualized reading of *Perfectae Caritatis*, places women religious among the people of God with everyone else, called to follow Jesus in a Gospel way of life. As women, religious are neither clergy nor quite lay, which women religious have known and embraced for a long time, renouncing quasi-clerical status within the larger church community.

But religious remain churchwomen, consecrated by vow to Christ in his way of ministerial life, poor, celibate, and obedient. For Jesus, this meant he was sent on mission by his Abba, a mission to bring the good news of salvation to all and summons to the experience of a merciful God. A dynamic openness to the world itself became for many religious a major focus of their ministries, and inspired compassion toward those in greatest need. The key sections of this document which remain clearly in focus for women religious and for Pope Francis are:

Religious, faithful to their profession and leaving all things for Christ's sake should follow him regarding this as the one thing that is necessary and should be solicitous for all that is his. The members of each Institute ought to seek God before all else, and solely; they should join contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart, to apostolic love, by which they endeavor to be associated with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God. (P.C. §5) And "...they should seek and love above all else God who has first loved us. In all circumstances they should take care to foster a life hidden with Christ in God, which is the source and stimulus of love of God and neighbor, for the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church. Even the very practice of the evangelical counsels is animated and governed by this charity." (P.C. § 6)

This same section also directs daily reading and meditating on the divine scriptures in personal prayer, and performing the liturgy—especially Eucharist. When religious are nourished by these rich sources, they love and serve their neighbors and receive the capacity to think with the Church. Most women religious were deeply affected by contemplating the Scripture and by their full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy; this involvement profoundly changed their lives.

Paul VI's *Evangelica Testificatio*

The second most important direction in *Evangelica Testificatio*, Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life

(According to the Teachings of Vatican II) to further guide the renewal of religious life describes apostolic (now ministerial, religious life) explicitly as essentially "proclaiming the Word of God" and leading others to faith. (E.T. §9) Further, to do so requires union with God because of the unity of action and contemplation. (E.T. §10)

The final section §11 of E.T. invited religious to reawaken their hearts "in accordance with the charisms of their founders who were raised up by God within the church." This retrieval, renewal, and re-appropriation of unique charisms became the dynamic guidance for authentic renewal. "The charism of religious life...is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church." (E.T. §11) This section ends with the statement that "the supreme rule of the religious life and its ultimate norm is that of following Christ according to the teaching of the Gospel." (E.T. §12)

Pope Francis and a Dynamic View

Francis, in "A Heart Wide as the World" clearly embraces this same dynamic view. In commenting on Vatican II, he said that "one thing is clear: the dynamic of reading the Gospel, actualizing its message for today—which was typical of Vatican II—is absolutely irreversible."¹⁰ By so doing, Francis assumes Vatican II as irreversible in its dynamic and interactive relationship with the Gospel and avoids the polarizing hermeneutics of "rupture" versus "continuity" in interpreting Vatican II. Religious life participates in this creative dynamic.

Finally, *Evangelica Testificatio* highlighted themes that Francis emphasizes: chastity as fruitful and generative, consecrated poverty as related to hearing and responding to the cry of the poor, responding to social injustice and avoiding such in our lives. Finally, it ends with the "fruitful radiation of joy," one of Francis' constant themes.

The joy of always belonging to God is an incomparable fruit of the Holy Spirit, and one, which you have already tasted. Filled with the joy, which Christ will preserve in you even in the midst of trial, learn to face the future with confidence. To the extent that this joy radiates from your communities, it will be a proof to

everyone that the state of life, which you have chosen, is helping you by the threefold renunciation of your religious profession to realize the greatest possible expansion of your life in Christ. (E.T. §55)

On-Going Tension between Static and Dynamic Worldviews

So much more could, of course, be said about how these conciliar and post-conciliar implementation documents were interpreted and misinterpreted and how their dynamics played out in different parts of the world. In the post-conciliar years, the tensions present in the council itself often emerged within religious congregations themselves, most of which managed to hold their congregations together while others split along ideological lines.

In the U.S., the IHM Sisters in Los Angeles eventually became non-canonical because of Cardinal McIntyre's insistence on trying to control their chapter of renewal. Without his interference, the sisters might have been able to work things out among themselves without either splitting into two congregations or changing their canonical status. Many other communities experienced similar tensions among themselves and were able eventually to work through them. Others had small groups split off to become independent while others joined another group that embraced their preferred approach to religious life.

Francis espouses a dynamic rather than a static view of religious life in ever-new contexts. And he appears to affirm boldness rather than timidity in following one's apostolic intuitions.

Confoy believes women religious in the U.S. continue to live with the effects of Cardinal Hickey's alliance with the Council of the Major Superiors of Women Religious, supporting their split from LCWR in 1993 over interpretations of renewal rather than keeping it all under LCWR's supervision. She also characterizes the Stonehill

Symposium, sponsored by this group, which included Sara Butler's call for an apostolic visitation as the current equivalent of the IHM situation.¹¹ No one knows who initiated the Doctrinal Investigation of LCWR, but Sara Butler remains the only woman religious on the US Bishops' Committee on Doctrine which forwarded the request to CDF.

Ignatian Influence on Francis' Views on Religious Life

Although Francis' *Wake Up the World!* (his conversation about Religious Life with the Union of Superiors General of Religious Men at their 82nd General Assembly) takes for granted the pastoral renewal intended by Vatican II, he also clearly incorporates the framework of *Consecrata Vita* promulgated in 1995. When Francis was appointed a bishop in 1992, he participated in

preparations for the Synod on Consecrated Life. At the time of his election to the papacy, he was a member of the Congregations for Divine Worship, for the Clergy, and for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

His experience of religious life and views about it were shaped by his Jesuit formation. The diocesan seminary where he began studies for the priesthood before becoming a Jesuit was

run by the Jesuits, and later he was appointed a Jesuit novice master. He was appointed provincial for Argentina in 1973 when he was only 37, during Fr. Pedro Arrupe's term as general of the Society of Jesus.¹²

Arrupe, when he was still a missionary in Japan, was an official auditor at Vatican II and met regularly with the women religious who eventually arrived as silent auditors; he represented their views whenever he could. As a missionary novice director and later provincial of Japan, an international missionary community, he argued at the Council for "inculturation" versus the preferred Roman approach of the church as a "transculture."

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I believe Francis' Jesuit formation was sharpened by the pivotal turn the Society of Jesus took during the Arrupe years, which embraced the mission of faith that does justice. His formation involved education in Ignatian discernment, absorption of the Ignatian charism, and integration of contemplative prayer and examination of consciousness as the basis for apostolic decisions and pastoral responses. The Society of Jesus had already begun its historical retrieval of their charism during the 1940's and 1950's prior to Vatican II. Fr. Arrupe as novice master in Japan during WWII and as a superior of an international group of Jesuits on mission had long been asking questions about how to form Japanese novices. How does a religious community just like the church inculturate its charism?

Besides the effect of the Arrupe years, Francis was shaped by his simple lifestyle among people who were poor, both during and after his formation. These Jesuit influences both shape what he says in *Wake Up the World* and impact his interviews and other writings.

For instance, Francis recognizes that in the process of inculturation of both the church itself and the charism of a religious community there "is the danger of making a mistake," "But that should not stop us, and we should "look shamefully upon apostolic failures due to a lack of courage." And he cites Matteo Ricci's "allowing his pioneer intuitions to crumble at that time."¹³ Francis espouses a dynamic rather than a static view of religious life in ever-new contexts. And he appears to affirm boldness rather than timidity in following one's apostolic intuitions.

The themes around which Francis' conversation ruminate are primarily rooted in male religious life¹⁴ and include Jesuit themes current up through the last Jesuit General Congregation 35 which elected Fr. Adolpho Nicolas, another charismatic Basque General.

Wake Up the World!

Turning to central themes in Pope Francis' *Wake up the World*, the perspective on religious life shifts from Europe and North America to the Southern Hemisphere. This perspective exemplifies a consequence of the larger conciliar shift to a global Catholicism¹⁵ identified by Karl

Rahner after Vatican II, but which shifted back somewhat to the Eurocentric Catholicism of the previous two papacies.

Francis naturally and easily sees the church from a global perspective. Key themes about religious life, developed by the time *Vita Consecrata* was published in 1995, find an echo in Francis' ruminations. These include: 1) the public witness of an evangelical life as "attractive"; 2) religious life as prophetic; and 3) the call to go to the "frontiers." These themes appear in Francis' speeches, including *Wake Up the World!* When Francis explains what he means by prophecy, he describes it as sometimes "making a noise or a mess," but more commonly, "the charism of religious people is like yeast: prophecy announces the spirit of the Gospel."¹⁶

Religious Life and the Theme of Prophetic Witness

Vita Consecrata is the first official ecclesial document that identifies religious life with prophetic witness, (V.C. II. 84-92), according to New Zealand Mercy, Ann Marie Harvey, *Vita Consecrata* identifies prophecy as the sign value of religious life. It also describes prophecy as "born of God, from friendship with God, from attentive listening to God's word in the ...circumstances of history." It includes a "burning desire for the holiness of God, whose word is heard in prayer," then proclaimed with their lives, their lips and their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. It requires a passionate search for God's will, for self-giving, for communion in the Church, the practice of spiritual discernment and love of the truth. It also denounces all that is contrary (V.C. § 7) to the divine will and seeks to explore new ways to apply the Gospel in history. The challenges of the vows are treated each in turn as part of this prophetic witness as well as the witness of faithfulness to the point of martyrdom.

Of particular note in Francis view is the prophetic value of celibacy as a witness of human love, drawing from Trinitarian love, and thus a religious is made capable of radical and universal love, so that celibacy appears as "a joyful and liberating experience." (V.C. § 88). Poverty is related both to resisting materialism and concern

for natural resources, service of the poor, and a preferential love for the poor, especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected.”(V.C.§ 90) This document was promulgated at the time that the Council of the Major Superiors of Women Religious in the U.S. had just been endorsed by the Vatican.

That Francis espouses the "prophetic" nature of religious life and the dynamic evolution of charism is deeply rooted in his own Jesuit history and the renewal of Jesuit life and mission before and after the council. Many religious communities of women learned from and relied on progressive Jesuits during this post-conciliar period. Some communities of women religious have embraced these qualities quite explicitly and paid a high price. A conflict of interpretation over “static” and “dynamic” remains in the U.S. This tension has unfortunately cast women religious and some bishops on both sides of the dynamic about what their “state of life” entails.

The Interpretation of *Vita Consecrata* by Pope Francis

In *Wake Up the World*, Francis takes the interpretation of *Vita Consecrata* for granted, and he references discussions that occurred at the synod.¹⁷ He associates religious life as prophetic to the dynamism of each community's particular charism, distinguishing between traditional works and the charism itself. The “charism,” he says, “is creative, always looking for outlets. In this way too, the peripheries change,”¹⁸ and this creates difference.

Francis assumes a dynamically changing situation and he acknowledges a series of challenges: inculturation of the charism, vocational discernment and the selection of candidates, the challenge of interreligious dialogue, the search for a more equitable representation in the governmental organization of the Institutes, and...in the structure of the Church. He gives some examples from his personal experience in these matters, which he applies, to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. (I propose that we as an Institute face some of these same questions both here and in the countries beyond the U.S.).

Francis refers to going to the “frontiers” or uses the image of the center and the periphery in several different contexts. The “frontiers” was a major theme of Jesuit General Congregation 35, held in 2008, which elected Fr. Adolpho Nicolas general to replace retiring Fr. Hans Kolvenbach. The phrase itself was first used by Benedict XVI in his Papal Address to members of Jesuit General Congregation 35. In that allocution, he cited a moving passage from Paul VI's similar address to General Congregation 32, 3 December 1974.

As my Predecessors have said to you on various occasions, the Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust, particularly to *reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching*. Paul VI's words remain engraved on your hearts: “Wherever in the Church, even in the most difficult and extreme fields, at the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, there has been and there is confrontation between the burning exigencies of people and the perennial message of the Gospel, here also there have been, and there are Jesuits,”¹⁹

In addition, Benedict XVI affirmed the mission “among and with the poor,” emphasized in General Congregation 32. He repeated remarks he had made to the Latin American Bishops at Aparecida, in 2007, that “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. II Cor. 8:9); it is therefore natural that those who truly want to be a companion of Jesus really share in his love for the poor. For us, the option for the poor is not ideological but is born from the Gospel.”²⁰

Many accounts of Jesuits who were present for this audience with Benedict XVI record a profound and positive response to his description of their Jesuit charism and his specific request for the mission to which he called them as a society at this time in their history. After the tension experienced when the Society was placed by John Paul II under Fr. Dezza, instead of Fr. Arrupe's American Assistant, Rev. Vincent O'Keefe, S.J., after Arrupe suffered a stroke, Benedict XVI's nuanced expression demonstrated his understanding of the Society's history and

charism. They were moved and energized. And they responded with "Decree 3, Challenges to our Mission Today: Sent to the Frontiers."²¹

Theme of Going to the Frontier

In many of Francis' addresses and remarks, he relies on this language of the "frontier"²² which he extends to all religious. In *Wake Up the World!* Francis responded to the question about "frontiers" as a situation of exclusion. He acknowledged that geographical frontiers still exist, "and that it is necessary to be available to move. But there are also symbolic frontiers that are not predetermined and are not the same for everyone, rather they "need to be sought on the basis of the charisms of each Institute."²³ Again, Francis emphasizes a habit of discernment in order to make these decisions. In discussing the choice of which members to send to situations of marginalization or exclusion, he said, "[S]end the best, most gifted people into these situations"²⁴ ...because they are the most risky...and call for courage and a great deal of prayer."²⁵ And they must be supported.

In *Wake Up the World!* he reprised remarks he had made in the earlier *La Civiltà Cattolica* interview in which he used a triad of "dialogue, discernment, and frontier."²⁶ There he identified his use of the "frontier" as a particular way of working in the world of multi-cultures that requires insertion into the context "in which they operate and on which they reflect."²⁷ He contrasts this insertion with the distance of laboratory knowledge rather than experiential knowledge. He also cited Fr. Arrupe's letter in which he said "one cannot speak of poverty if one does not experience poverty, with direct connection to the places in which there is poverty."²⁸

Theme of Community Relations

The final theme in *Wake Up the World!* that invites reflection is the relationship between living

together and dialogue. Since Francis was speaking to male religious, he phrases this as "Living Brotherhood by Soothing Conflicts."²⁹ While it is possible to switch the terminology from "brotherhood" to "sisterhood" this is not entirely an effective translation. Women's patterns of living in community have never been entirely similar to religious communities of clergy, although perhaps not so different from brothers.

When he was asked about the role of community living in the New Evangelization, Francis described the community at Taizé and the way they live a real life of brotherhood that has an apostolic effect on the young people who visit the site. Francis acknowledged the challenges and difficulties of community, but he insisted that community life "with all its possible diversity, is an experience of love that goes beyond conflicts."³⁰

Francis gives several examples of overcoming conflict so that by concretely loving another, conflicts can be overcome. The editors of that interview point the reader to Nos. 226-230 in *Evangelii Gaudium*³¹ where Francis connects overcoming conflict with the beatitude of peace-making. Francis espouses tenderness as the most likely way of overcoming conflict.³² This approach may be the result of his learning how ineffective he was as a provincial when he acted harshly and non-dialogically.

He indicates to the heads of Consecrated Life that it is time to re-visit *Mutuae Relationes* and update it. He acknowledges that bishops "are not always acquainted with the charisms and works of religious."³³ He counsels, "Dialogue between the bishop and religious must be rescued so that, due to a lack of understanding of their charisms, bishops do not view religious simply as useful instruments."³⁴

In *A Heart Wide as the World*, Francis describes Peter Faber, whom he recently canonized, as a model priest, citing "his dialogue with all...even the most remote and even with his opponents; his simple piety, a certain naiveté perhaps, his being available straightaway, his

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careful interior discernment, the fact that he was a man capable of great and strong decisions but also capable of being so gentle and loving.”³⁵ This sounds very much how one might describe Francis himself.

Knowing whom their ecclesial dialogue partners are, women religious in the U.S. might wonder how capable some of them are in genuine dialogue. Yet it is important for women of Mercy to affirm our own commitment to non-violent communication, and to continue to engage in appreciative, contemplative dialogue with one another in community as well as in all our relational and ministerial settings.

Francis' *Wake Up the World!* as an informal conversation, is a model of collegial dialogue. Its tone is mutual, trusting, and respectful. Francis demonstrates that he knows the concrete challenges of governance in religious congregations, and at the same time, invites fresh dreaming about how religious life might become once again so full of life that religious might, indeed, “Wake Up the World” as prophetic, ministerial religious, grounded in contemplation, skilled in discernment and alive with the joy of a gospel way of life. This trajectory was implicit in *Perfectae Caritatis*, affirmed repeatedly, although not without counter positions in “Essential Elements of Religious Life”³⁶ in the 1980's and then solidly endorsed in *Vita Consecrata* in 1995.

The ministerial lives of women of Mercy have taken us to never imagined “frontiers” in housing, immigration, women's issues, water, eco-justice, spiritual direction, pastoral care, contemplative dialogue, ecumenism, and creativity in healthcare and educational ministries. Might we be inspired to work with Francis' vision and express our reality as women religious in explicitly Christological and gospel language? Might this become a path through the current impasse with some in the hierarchy?

Representing the Perspective of Bishops of Latin America

Francis assumed responsibility for writing the “Aparecida Document,” the Final Document from CELAM, the Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a lengthy document, arrived at through intense dialogue. It

gives a useful view of Francis' vision for the universal church, based on this model of dialogue, arriving at unity in the Spirit, which is neither uniformity nor dissension. There are several paragraphs on “Consecrated men and women, missionary disciples of Jesus, the Father's Witness.” (§§ 216-224) These reflections conclude with a stirring paragraph from CELAM's vision of consecrated life, one more window into Francis' views on religious life:

Today in Latin America and the Caribbean, consecrated life is called to be a discipleship life, fervent about Jesus-Way to the merciful Father, and hence deeply mystical and communitarian in nature. It is called to be a missionary life, fervent about proclaiming Jesus-Word of the Father; and hence radically prophetic, capable of illuminating in the light of Christ the shadows of the contemporary world and the paths of new life, and hence what is required is a prophetic witness that yearns even to surrender one's life in continuity with the tradition of holiness and martyrdom of so many religious men and women over the history of the continent. It must likewise be at the service of the world, fervent for Jesus-Life of the Father, who becomes present in the little ones and those who are least whom it wishes to serve from its own charism and spirituality.³⁷ ♦

Endnotes

¹ “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life. Antonio Spadaro, S.J. original text in Italian (*La Civiltà Cattolica* 2104 I 3-17) translated into English by Fr. Donald Maldari, S.J. (revised, Jan 6)

² All citations noted are from Austin Flannery, O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II, Vol. 1: The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*. New Revised Edition. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975.)

³ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul II, *Consecrated Life, Vita Consecrata*, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1996.)

⁴ Maryanne Confoy, R.S.C., *Religious Life and Priesthood: Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Prebyteriorum Ordinis*. (Mahwah: Paulist, 2008.)

⁵ Maryanne Confoy, R.S.C., “Religious Life in the Vatican II Era: ‘State of Perfection’ or Living Charism,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), 321-346.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁷ In addition to Confoy's analysis I've summarized above, see also Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah: Paulist, Press, 2012). Faggioli describes feminist liberation theology developing after Vatican II in the U.S. as not challenging Vatican II, and as being confined primarily to the U.S. But the developing

contextualized theologies in Asia are increasingly feminist among women religious in the Amor group.

⁸ Both LCWR and The Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious believe they are implementing the reforms of religious life called for at Vatican II and later.

However, the institutionalization of this conflict of interpretation over Vatican was institutionalized by both organizations officially representing women religious in the U.S. at the Vatican, each with Episcopal supporters. The U.S. is the only country or region in the world with two such official organizations representing religious life at the Vatican.

⁹ As I was writing these reflections, Cardinal Joao Braz had just stepped into the latest CDF debacle, trying to defuse it, even as Sr. Sara Butler, the only woman religious theologian on the US Bishops Committee who called for the original apostolic visitation is given a full page on the theology of women in *L'Osservatore Romano* next to Mueller's opening remarks to the Leaders of LCWR in *L'Osservatore Romano*. See Gerhard Muller, "Dialogue and Discernment" p. 9 and Sara Butler, S.M.B.T. "Redeeming Relationships" 10-11, Number 19, (Friday 9 May 2014).accessed on line. It is perhaps no accident these essays appeared together.

¹⁰ "A Big Heart Open to God," interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., September 30, 2013 *America*, 15-38, p. 30.

¹¹ Confoy, "Religious Life in the Vatican II Era," "I believe it is important to see the continuity of resistance and of the abuse of power exercised by some bishops in reaction to the ministerial leadership of religious in their dioceses. There are multiple examples of the suffering caused by autocratic and sometimes inadequately informed bishops in reaction to leadership exercised by individual religious as well as in congregational initiatives." F.N. 33.

¹² See my "Ignatian Mysticism of Service: Ignatius of Loyola and Pedro Arrupe" in *Mysticism and Social Transformation*, ed. Janet K. Ruffing, RSM in which I describe Arrupe as refounding the Society of Jesus. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001): 104-128.

¹³ Francis I, "Wake Up the World: Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life" with Antonio Spadaro, S.J. *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2014 (3-17), English trans. Fr. Donald Maldari, S.J. (rev. Jan 6), 6.

¹⁴ Pope Francis spent about 20 minutes with the Union of Superiors General of Religious Women during which he said little. He spent nearly three hours with the Union of Superiors General of Religious Men, with whom he has had a long history, and of whom a large number are also clerics. His conversation with them was recorded and edited for publication by Antonio Spadaro, another Jesuit, who aptly notes the particularly Jesuit flavor and context of some of his comments. It is difficult to know if Francis' views on religious life are equally applicable to women religious.

¹⁵ Karl Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Investigations*, vol. XX (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), pp. 77-89.

¹⁶ Francis I, "Wake Up the World: Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life" with Antonio Spadaro, S.J. *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2014 (3-17), English trans. Fr. Donald Maldari, S.J. (rev. Jan 6), 5.

¹⁷ For example, Francis explicitly endorses the criticism of Filipino bishops of congregations opening houses in the Philippines to recruit "vocations to be transplanted to Europe," demonstrating his familiarity with the discussions. "Wake up the World," 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹ (*Allocution*, n.2, p.4). Benedict XVI went on to say to them in his own words, "The Church thus urgently needs people with a deep and sound faith, a well-grounded culture and genuine human and social sensitivity, of Religious and priests who dedicate their lives to being on these frontiers to bear witness and to help people understand that on the contrary there is profound harmony between faith and reason, between the Gospel spirit, the thirst for justice and initiatives for peace. Only in this way will it be possible to make the Lord's true Face known to the many for whom he is still concealed or unrecognizable. The Society of Jesus should therefore give preferential attention to this. Faithful to its best tradition, it must persevere in taking great pains to form its members in knowledge and virtue and not to be content with mediocrity, since confrontation and dialogue with the very different social and cultural contexts and the diverse mentalities of today's world is one of the most difficult and demanding tasks. This quest for quality and for human, spiritual and cultural validity must also characterize the whole of the Jesuits' many-faceted formative and educative activities as they come into contact with people of every sort wherever they may happen to be. *Allocution*, No. 4. Benedict XVI had also applied this notion of "frontiers" to women religious May 7, 2007, in an address to Superiors General of Women. "In you I thank the immense army of witnesses to Christ's love who operate on the frontiers of evangelization, education and social charity." (*Agenzia Fides* 8/5/2007) Accessed online, Yale University.

²⁰ *Allocution*, No. 8.

²¹ GC35, Decree 3, 1-8. Cuban, Benjamin Gonzalez Buelta, S.J. exemplifies this response of the members of GC35 in his article "GC 35: On the Frontier, Humble, and Consoled." *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 39 (3/2008) 8-22. Trans. Robert Hurd, S.J.

It was decisive for the Society to reconfirm the great frontiers of our time already assumed by the previous post-conciliar General Congregations: the service of faith and the promotion of justice in a "choice of the poor [that is not ideological but is born from the Gospel]" (*Allocution* Benedict XVI), the dialogue with the different cultures impacted today by the global culture which puts out without rest innumerable images on all the screens of the world, and the interreligious dialogue in a moment in which war and confrontation are often legitimized with religious creeds.

These great options of the Society are situated today in the new context of globalization, which has arrived in all corners of the planet. To these challenges are added others, which are acquiring each morning new and surprising proportions, such as ecology, bioethics, migrations, etc. We remain on these former frontiers and assume new ones.

In this Congregation we have made a key affirmation; we pledge to “stand on these frontiers” (*Allocution*, Benedict XVI) outside spaces already conquered, delimited, foreseeable and secure. “Frontiers,” Fr. A. Nicolas reminded us, ‘can be places of conflict which put in danger our reputation, tranquility and security...’ (GC25, 1,6). The frontier can be a chair of bioethics in a university, an emarginated barrio permanently unstable with organized bands fighting over control of the territory and drugs, a refugee camp, a television studio where people are searching for language to speak today of God, a community of open doors in a Moslem neighborhood where life itself is the only word of faith that can be pronounced, a constant flow of migrants who uproot themselves incessantly like a river to our reception centers, or the accompaniment of so many lives who desire to find someone to help them to clarify the interior distress that is tearing them apart .14.

²² See *A Big Heart Open to God*, for Francis’ description of the Society of Jesus, it is centered in Christ and his Church,...two fundamental points of reference for its balance and for being able to live on the margins, on the frontier.” 18.

²³ *Wake Up the World!* 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *A Heart Big as the World*, 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Wake up the World!*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*,10.

³¹ *Ibid.*,11.

³² *Ibid.*,12.

³³ *Ibid.*,12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,13.

³⁵ *A Big Heart Open to God*, 20.

³⁶ “Essential Elements of the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate” published but never promulgated by SCRSI in 1983.

³⁷ CELAM 5, Aparecida, 2007. 5.



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Saints in the Original Rule—Mystics and Ministers

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

One of the most exciting moments in the lives of new parents is the moment of naming their new baby. They sift through options; think about persons whom they admire or names of favorite relatives. They imagine the child who will carry that name through life. They want a name that captures the hoped-for spirit of their child, a name that matches their character. Naming and relationship go together.

Within the Christian faith tradition children are often given a saint's name at their baptism. While for some parents, the name might simply be a favorite one, for others it is the name of someone whom they wish to be a spirit guide for the child. This custom of selecting patrons has a rich and diverse history. A quick check online of "patron saints" reveals a myriad number of saints associated with towns, virtues and professions. Other listings reveal a belief in the intercessory role of the saints especially in relationship to diseases or dangerous situations.¹ If you have questionable cooking skills, you can call upon St. Zita; if a journalist, St. Francis de Sales or, if looking for a house, St. Joseph. There are so many questionable superstitions around the efficacy of praying to saints, that we can miss their role as witnesses to holiness and service. It is in this role as witness and model that we find Catherine lifting up saints as spirit guides for her sisters.

Catherine McAuley Names Saints for Sisters of Mercy

When Catherine McAuley crafted the Original Rule for the Order, she carried over into it the patron saints of the Presentation Rule, all but one. She eliminated St. John Francis Regis. Her reasons for doing so are lost to history, but we can more easily discover possible reasons for her

inclusion of three additional patrons: Saints John of God, Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena.² These three saints give us a hint of the spiritual movement that flowed through Catherine's spirituality.

Catherine crafted an expanded list of patron saints for her fledgling community; in these additions, she lifted up saints who could mirror how her Sisters were to serve those who were sick: "St. Vincent de Paul, Saint John of God, Saint Camillus of Lellis, Saint Ignatius, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Aloysius, Saint Angela DeMerici, Saints Catherine of Siena and Genoa were particularly distinguished."³ Catherine says, "Such bright examples and the great recompense promised must be strong motives for the Sisters of this Holy Institute, to fulfill with fervor and delight every part of this meritorious duty."⁴

Catherine's Editing of the Presentation Rule

When we explore the reasons for Catherine's additions to the catalogue of saints in the Rule, we might presume that she simply moved over the patron saints of the Presentation Community as a matter of form. The exclusion of St. John Francis Regis tells us otherwise. Catherine edited the Presentation Rule to fit her spiritual vision and purposes. Sometimes the change was the substitution of a word, at other times the deletion of a paragraph. All was intentional.

In the light of that practice, it is important to look at the saints she selected as guides for her young community. An 1881 copy of the Presentation Rule lists them as "St. Joseph, St. Anne, and St. Joachim, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and St. John the Evangelist, St. Patrick and St. Bridget, St. Francis of Sales, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Francis Regis, St. Agustin and St.

Catherine says, "Such bright examples and the great recompense promised must be strong motives for the Sisters of this Holy Institute, to fulfill with fervor and delight every part of this meritorious duty."

Monica, St. Vincent of Paul, and St. Joseph Calasanz, institutor of the pious schools for children in Italy, and St. Angela of Merici.”⁵

Catherine not only eliminated St. Francis Regis but also the explanatory phrase identifying St. Joseph Calasanz as founder of schools for boys in Italy.

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M. cautions those who try to mine the Original Rule for Catherine’s spirituality, without examining the various stages of its formation. In her introduction to Catherine McAuley’s manuscript found in *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, Sullivan points out that there is a variance between the Original Rule written by Catherine and edited by Daniel Murray, and the Italian version that was returned from Rome in 1841 and translated into English.⁶ In the emended translation, St. Francis of Sales is omitted and four saints are added: St. Peter Nolasco, St. Ignatius, St. Camillus of Lellis and St. Aloysius Gonzaga. While the latter three are found in the Chapter on *Care of the Sick*, Catherine did not include them in her list of patron saints. St. Peter Nolasco does not appear in her original list.

St. Francis de Sales, John of God, Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena

The Italian document’s omission of St. Francis of Sales is puzzling on many accounts. Francis is among the saints most quoted by Catherine. In *Familiar Instructions of Catherine McAuley*⁷, a transcription of her teachings, he is quoted over fifteen times, more than any other source. There is also a keen resonance between passages of his writings and passages found in Catherine’s teachings. Both highlighted the holiness of the ordinary, attentiveness to the present moment, the primacy of love and the revelation of Christ in the persons and situations we meet in daily living.

Francis of Sales had a direct influence upon the Presentation Rule, which itself borrowed from the Rule of the Visitation Sisters. Francis’ texts on “Humility and the Role of the Mistress of

Novices” found in the Presentation Rule were among those selected by Catherine for inclusion in the Mercy Rule.⁸

The Roman decision to include Peter Nolasco among the patrons of the Institute is also puzzling. Nowhere in Catherine’s writings does she make special mention of him or his work. In *Familiar Instructions* we find over 25 different saints quoted, some multiple times, but he is not among them. Instead we find that Francis of Sales, Ignatius, Teresa of Avila and Mary Magdalen dePazzi are the most frequently referenced.⁹ One can only conjecture that the anonymous editor must have seen St. Peter’s work of ransoming captives as especially congruent with the works of the young Order.

In the *Retreat Instructions of Catherine McAuley*, compiled by Sr. M. Teresa Purcell, scriptural figures like Peter and Paul are quoted most frequently; Saints Francis of Sales, Gregory, Ignatius and Bernard are also cited. The variance between the two works might have more to do with the transcriber than with Catherine.

Reflection on the lives and ministries of the three saints added to the Original Rule by Catherine provides some intimations of what vision animated her hopes for the Institute. All three saints-- John of God, Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena-- shared a passion to be of service to the suffering poor of their time. They gave themselves unstintingly to the sick. None of the three had the intention of founding new religious orders, but persons were attracted to them through the power of their witness. All three were noted for their constancy in prayer and the intimacy with God, which characterized their lives.

From a modern perspective, all three of the saints exhibited behaviors that we would characterize today as excessive but which were common in their time and culture. What was not common was the ardor of their work to serve Christ in the suffering persons before them. God worked through their limitations and brokenness to do “wondrous things.” The saints Catherine selected did not seek after extraordinary gifts from

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God. They simply loved extraordinarily.

St. John of God

The ministry of John of God must have found a spiritual resonance in Catherine. John had a burning desire to help those who were the outcasts of his society. Once he experienced his inner conversion, he gave everything he had to see that those in need did not go without essentials. Deemed a “madman” by some, he was confined to a mental hospital.¹⁰ It was there he learned how to tend the sick and gave himself totally to his fellow patients. His biographer, speaking about the abuse of the sick that John witnessed first-hand, says:

John felt profoundly sad at this shameful neglect of the sick. To him the work of tending the ailing and infirm was not just a job, it was something very much higher, a sacred vocation, almost a priesthood. Just as the priest holds in his hands the Body of Jesus in the Mass, so those who minister to the sick, wash and feed and bandage and soothe the pain of the Body of Our Lord. For has He not told us Himself that whatever we do to even the least of His brethren, we do to Himself. To John it appeared as bordering on sacrilege to neglect the patients.¹¹

Catherine and John shared that vision of Christ living in the persons they served. Neither could turn away anyone because to do so was to turn away Christ Himself. They both were motivated by their understanding of Matthew 25: “Whatever to do to the least of these, you do to me.”

Like Catherine McAuley, John’s tender compassion and wholehearted commitment drew companions to his work. What he began alone was taken up by companions who made it possible for him to act on a dream--opening a shelter for the sick. There is again a parallel. John’s dream seemed out of reach but his trust in the provident mercy of God gave him the courage to pursue it to its realization. Finally, another resonance Catherine might have found in the life of John was his simplicity. He always saw himself as the least among others.

**John’s dream
seemed out of reach
but his trust in the
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courage to pursue it
to its realization.**

The realization of how mercy had touched his life animated him to let everything flow through him to others--food, his bed, shelter, clothes and most of all his time and compassion. Even though they lived over two centuries’ distance in time, Catherine and John were kindred spirits.

St. Catherine of Genoa

Catherine may have added Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena to the list of Mercy patrons because she admired their lives of holiness and service. However, both women exemplify the fusion of action and contemplation. Catherine McAuley’s determination to keep her sisters free of the restraints of cloister must have been bolstered by the examples of these great women.

There were other resonances in the life of Catherine of Genoa that link Catherine McAuley’s faith journey with hers. St. Catherine of Genoa was born to comfort, but lost her father to death when still young. At thirteen she was given in an arranged marriage to a man who was unfaithful. She endured a great deal of suffering for ten years before her moment of spiritual conversion. Catherine embarked upon a life of service in the Pammatone Hospital, which offered care for the sick poor. Her husband also experienced conversion and shared this work with her. He suffered a financial crisis and was driven to bankruptcy. They went from being persons of means to being in such desperate straits, they had little to give but themselves.¹²

When Catherine McAuley reflected upon the life of Catherine of Genoa, she must have felt a kindred soul in the loss of her own father and the family’s subsequent impoverishment. Experiencing those losses inspired empathy in both Catherines and was a foundation for their sensitivity to people in economic need.

Nursing did not come naturally to Catherine of Genoa. We see in her writings that she took strong measures to overcome her aversion to lice and infectious wounds.¹³ Catherine’s passion to serve the poor prompted her to overcome her emotional resistance so she could serve the

physical needs of the poor freely, without repulsion. Catherine grew gradually into her ministry of caring for the sick. It was without a plan, more of a gradual, evolving response out of her love for God.

St. Catherine of Siena

Parallels between Catherine McAuley and Catherine of Siena are less clear. Catherine McAuley avoided extremes in spiritual exercises and penances. At the same time, biographers of Catherine of Siena in Catherine McAuley's day emphasized her extreme spiritual practices, such as fasting. In some ways Catherine of Siena was larger than life—a counselor to Popes, a negotiator of peace, a recipient of mystical graces, and a writer of theological treatises.

Catherine McAuley was larger than life in her littleness. What might have attracted Catherine McAuley to St. Catherine as a patron was, once more, the integration of the contemplative and active life. Speaking of Catherine of Siena, Patricia Mary Vinje says:

Catherine's active life and her mystical experience cannot actually be separated. What she experienced in her prayer led her to reach out to sick and sinful people, to arbitrate disputes and to seek reform in the church. Her daily activities were present in her prayer, and at the same time her prayer and contemplation were present in her activities to the extent that she often prayed in the

middle of what she was doing or saying.¹⁴

A second convergence was that Catherine of Siena herself exercised two of Catherine McAuley's strongest ministerial activities-- caring for the sick and teaching.

Common Traits of Catherine McAuley's Saints

Collectively, the three saints added by Catherine to the list of Mercy's patron saints all shared a compelling desire to care for the sick. Some saints retained by Catherine from the Presentation Rule were witnesses to that healing ministry, such as St. Vincent de Paul. Others were

Today we don't often
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traditional patrons of
the Institute. However,
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ministries offer us a
witness that transcends
time and culture.

long established icons of faith such as St. Bridget or St. Paul. Some embodied the generosity of giving their lives to proclaim the Gospel, such as Francis Xavier. Angela Merici dedicated herself to teaching the poor. What all possessed was the balance of contemplation and action that was core to Catherine's apostolic vision. She did not select saints who were cloistered from the world, but ones who were actively engaged in it, who went out into

the streets and into the cities. In going out into the world, these saints energetically served their brothers and sisters because they saw in them the living Christ.

They found their energy for mission in the depths of their prayer. The saints Catherine named in her Original Rule seemed to her successful examples of wedding the mystic and the minister. In imitating these saints, we wed the mystic and the minister in our own day. ♦

Endnotes

¹On the internet there a multiple listing for Catholic saints. Some include: www.catholic.org/saints or www.roman-catholic-saints.com.

²Original Rule, 16.3 as quoted in Sullivan, Mary C. *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 1995).

³Original Rule, 3.2 as quoted in *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*.

⁴Original Rule, 3.2.

⁵*Rules and Constitutions of the Institute of the Religious Sisters of the Presentation of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary, established in the city of Cork, for the Charitable Instruction of Poor Girls.* (M.H. Gill and Son: Dublin, 1881), 10.4.

⁶Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 264, 280-281.

⁷McAuley, Catherine. *Familiar Instruction of Rev. Mother McAuley*. (Vincentian Press: St. Louis, Mo., 1927)

⁸*Rules and Constitutions of the Institute of the Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Every Blessed Virgin Mary* Part I: 28, 48-49; 12:1,2 and Part II, 6:1-3. I am indebted to the work of an unknown doctrinal student who prepared this edition with a comparative study of the Mercy and Presentation Rules.

⁹Rev. Mother McAuley, *Familiar Instructions*.

¹⁰Norbert McMahon, *St. John of God: Heavenly Patron of the Sick and Dying, Nurses and Hospitals*. (McMullen Books, Inc.: New York, 195) p. 67.

¹¹Norbert McMahon, *St. John of God*, p. 73.

¹²*Catherine of Genoa, Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*. Intro. Benedict J. Groeschel. (Paulist Press: New York, 1979), pp. 1-43.

¹³Catherine of Genoa, *The Spiritual Dialogue*. p. 131.

¹⁴Patricia Mary Vinje, *Praying with Catherine of Siena*. (St. Mary's Press: Winona, MN, 1990.), p. 24.



Prayer to St. Anthony



So how did you get stuck
As the "Patron of Lost Things"
I'm glad you are there in times of need
Nothing frustrates more
Than an object misplaced

All my life you've miraculously found
Needles in haystacks
Those sneaky car keys and purses
Hiding when you need them most
One quick exhortation
Nothing asked from you in return
You, Tony, are the go-to man



Maria Allo, M.D.
June 2012



Apostolic Spirituality: Convocation Address of 1984¹

Norita Cooney, R.S.M.

I want to begin with a story that is part of our heritage as Christians. The story is from the second book of Kings (chapters 6 and 7) and I am indebted to Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B., who brought new meaning to this scripture passage for me in a talk given several years ago.

Israel is under siege and the suffering is extreme. Food shortages are so severe that people with money are paying “eight pieces of silver for a donkey’s head and five pieces of silver for the dung of doves.” And the poor? As usual, it is the women who are trying to provide. Since there is no food, these mothers have started to determine which of their children will be eaten first.

Outside the walls of the city, the Syrians make no move to attack. They simply wait for the Israelites within to die.

Neither the Israelites in the city, nor the Syrians encamped outside, have the time or the interest to notice four lepers sitting at the city gates and trying to decide what they should do about the situation. One leper says, “If we just sit here and wait, we will die.” Another responds, “It’s no use going into the city, because we would starve to death in there; but if we stay here, we’ll die also. So let’s go to the Syrian camp. The worst they can do is kill us, but maybe they will spare our lives.

And so the lepers decide to leave their city and their people to go to a new territory. They slowly move away from walls that have sheltered them and given them sustenance and security all of their lives. The writers tell us, “The lepers went in darkness.”

But a marvelous thing happens. When the lepers reach the Syrian camp no one is there. The Lord has gone before them with a great sound and the sound is so loud the Syrians think the King of Israel has hired mercenaries to attack. So, scripture tell us, “The Syrians fled for their lives abandoning their tents, horses, donkeys and food.

You can imagine how the lepers acted when they came upon the empty camp. They went from tent to tent eating the food and collecting the money and clothing. But then they said to each other: “We shouldn’t be doing this. We have good news and we shouldn’t keep it to ourselves. Let us go and tell the people in the city.” It was in this way that the whole community of Israel was liberated, renewed, and made effective in the world again.

The siege of Israel is symbolic of the situation in which we find ourselves as a world community today. Our resources are scarce and unevenly distributed. The rich have the silver to provide for their needs and their wants.

The poor are reduced to destroying each other in order to survive. More importantly, I believe, our world has lost its will to survive.

Mercy Ministry in the Future

This is the context out of which I would like to speak to you about Mercy ministry for the future. As a religious community our position in relation to the world is not unlike that of the four lepers sitting outside the gates of the city and witnessing the carnage that is happening to their people.

Philosophers and theologians, scientists and futurists speak of our age as a time of parenthesis—a time between two definite eras in history. The worldviews we come out of no longer make sense economically, politically or religiously. The ways in which we organize and explain the worlds of our past and our present are no longer capable of handling the new realities, which confront us. Like the lepers in the Book of Kings, we have three possible choices at this time of breakdown:

- 1) We can go back into the city and try to reconstruct the world of the past and the religious community of the past. We know this past brought security, and identity, and

meaning, to our life together. I think we also know, deep down, if we do this we will surely die.

- 2) We could stay where we are; rejecting the past, carving out our own little niche of security and meaning in the present, but unwilling to struggle together to create a vision for the future. That too, I believe, would lead to death. Perhaps we will die more slowly, but we will die nonetheless.
- 3) Or, we can risk moving together toward a new vision of the world, and of Mercy ministry in relation to that world, which will give meaning and hope to our future.

When I think of the challenge that faces us I am reminded of a story that came out of the Second World War. During that time a German widow hid Jewish refugees in her own home. When her friends discovered the situation they became extremely alarmed. "You are risking your own life," they told her. "I know that," she said. "Then why," they demanded, "do you persist in this foolishness?" "I am doing it," she said, "because the time is now, and I am here."

Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M., has said: "Each generation in human history has its own task, its own destiny. We must not shy away from the privilege that belongs to our age and our community; the privilege of sustaining this world and its people in a time of profound change. It is our privilege to know what can no longer be. It is our agony to be ignorant of what will finally emerge. In this time of breakdown and breakthrough we are invited to participate in two profoundly human works of Mercy—to console the dying and to bring forth the living."

Let us embrace our role as "Passover people," women of the "between time" in our history. This is my plea and also my challenge. The task of breaking new ground and creating new history is a difficult one. The call is to leave behind and begin anew. The temptation is to stay a while longer, to squeeze some

more life out of old beliefs and structures that are no longer relevant.

It would be so much easier to leave behind if we could see clearly the new world we are called to create. But ours is a more difficult task; to journey in faith toward a land known only to God; and, to believe that God will go before us with a mighty sound into the word beyond our present walls.

Ministry is Not Just Our Institutional Commitments

Because we can't see clearly the new world we are called to create, it is difficult for me to talk about specific Mercy ministries for the future. I do, however, have personal convictions about what will enable us to create a corporate vision of ministry for the future and that is what I would like to share with you today.

My first conviction is this: We will not create a corporate vision of our ministry for the future by focusing on the types of ministries we should perform, or, on the places in which we should carry out our ministries. Our corporate vision of ministry cannot be identified solely with our institutional commitments. Neither can our vision be linked solely to the ministry efforts of individual sisters. It is not *what* we do or *where* we do it that is of primary importance. The more significant question is *why* we do what we do. If we could get to the why we could move beyond some of the institutional versus individual ministry tensions that plague our discussions today. I think

by focusing on the *why* we would also discover the bonds that unite our individual ministries and our institutional ministries and we would be much more supportive of the efforts of each other.

Ministry Is Not Ultimately What Binds Us As Community

A second conviction of mind is that we will not get anywhere in our effort to articulate a vision for the future, if we continue to say that our community exists primarily for the purpose of ministry. To be sure, ministry has always played a very significant role in how we define our selves as Sisters of Mercy.

The task of breaking
new ground and
creating new history is
a difficult one. The call
is to leave behind and
begin anew. The
temptation is to stay a
while longer, to
squeeze some more life
out of old beliefs and
structures that are no
longer relevant.

But ministry is not the only thing that binds us together as community.

I am reminded of a letter Catherine McAuley wrote to a priest who was inquiring about the possibilities of a young woman entering the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine said, "If she would like to share the joys and bittersweets of our lives, and tell us where to find the poor, we shall be most grateful to have her become one of us." Surely we would welcome into our community today women who could "tell us where to find the poor." But we want more. We also want women who can share the daily ups and downs of life, with all that entails, in terms of living the vows and struggling, painful as it is, with the question of how we want to be in relationship to each other in community.

It is my personal belief that we will never become what the world needs us to become in terms of ministry, until we also understand what it means to be an "integrally apostolic community." I think this phrase means much more than existing solely for the purpose of ministry.

In his book, *Discipleship: Toward an Understanding of Religious Life*, John Lozano points out that the term "apostolic life" was first used to indicate that religious life imitated the lifestyle of the disciples in renouncing all and following Jesus. Lozano goes on to state that historically the vocation to discipleship has always included:

- A call to place oneself as the service of Jesus in his ministry of evangelization;
- A desire to be associated with Jesus despite persecution
- A willingness to participate in the uprooted life of Jesus and
- A commitment to form a group, together with Jesus, which would prophetically express, and
- actually initiate, the eschatological community.

I would suggest that we need to look at all of these components in relationship to each other if we

are to understand our mission of service in this time of breakdown and breakthrough.

Ministry and Our Relationship to the Institutional Church

The third point I would like to make regards our relationship with the church. More and more I hear religious saying that we don't need the church, at least the institutional church, in order to do what we want to do in ministry. It's very easy to understand our source of disillusionment with the church. I have been very outspoken about the action of the church toward women. I have also shed many tears over our community experiences with the church on the tuba ligation issue and the political ministry issue.

But I truly believe that our identity as a religious community is integrally linked to the Church's mission of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. I know too, it is because I love the church so much, that I am hurt so deeply by her actions. The challenge for us, I think, as we move into the future, is that of articulating clearly, our love for the church, and our commitment to the church, even as we continue to say, in the familiar lines of a recent movie, "We're mad as hell and we're not going to take this any more."

A Spirituality of Hope: Seeing in the Dark

Finally, and more importantly, I would say that we must develop a spirituality that will give meaning to this time of breakdown and also, engender hope in the possibilities of breakthrough toward a new world order.

There is a line from the play *Equus* that has always been a favorite of mine: "We need a way of seeing in the dark." We have to believe, at the very core of our existence, that what is happening to us is of God, and that somehow, in this darkness, God is creating a future for us that will exceed our expectations.

Over the last twenty years of renewal, in the church and in religious life, we have received some

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marvelous gifts from God. I count among the most significant gifts, our new understandings of God and of our relationship to God. The seeds of an apostolic spirituality are within each of us. But we can't keep our God to ourselves. We have to discover together who God is for us, and how God is for us, as a religious community. One of the insights I have gained over these years of renewal is the realization that God does not only reveal himself and herself to individuals as individuals. The story of the nation of Israel is the story of a God who chose to be among a people as a people. The God of our personal lives is somehow intimately linked with the God we know in community. When we are vulnerable enough to share God with each other, and open enough to discover the God that is being revealed in the community gathered together, we will be on our way toward the development of an apostolic spirituality.

There is a section from Elie Wiesel's book, *Souls on Fire*, that illustrates what I am trying to say. The Rabbi is trying to explain what the Hasidic form of Judaism is to his people. "Do you want to know what Hasidism is?" he asks? "Do you know the story of the ironmonger who wanted to become independent? He bought an anvil, a hammer and bellows, and went to work. Nothing happened. The forge remained inert. Then an old ironmonger, whose advice he sought, told him, "You have everything you need but the spark."

When we are able to articulate the spirituality that gives form and meaning to our life of today and our dream for tomorrow, we will have discovered the spark. We will also know what our corporate vision of ministry is.

Elements of An Apostolic Spirituality

Let me just share with you some beliefs that I think are the seeds of that spirituality. Later this morning I will ask you to share your reflections on other elements of an apostolic spirituality.

The beliefs I have discovered in my own life and in our life together in Mercy that I think are somehow integral to an apostolic spirituality are these:

- All that we do is of God and for God.
- God needs us as much as we need God.
- Nothing is achieved; all is given.

- We go together on that journey toward a land known only to God.

I can't articulate clearly what these beliefs mean to me, but I have some stories and experiences that have given meaning to the words I use. I would like to share these with you for the purpose of encouraging your own reflections as individuals and as a congregation.

Way back in the mid-1960's when we were just beginning our struggles with renewal, I fell in love with the works of J.D. Salinger. There are three ideas from his works that can sharpen our understanding of what it means to say, "All we do is of God and for God."

All We Do Is of God and for God

The first understanding is contained in a short story called "Teddy." The main character is describing how he came to know God. "I was sitting at the breakfast table one morning," says Teddy, "pouring milk from a pitcher into my glass. All of a sudden I realized that what I was doing was pouring God into God."

In another story, "Franny and Zooey," (who are brother and sister) they are trying to discover where Jesus is in their life. In their youth, Franny and Zooey and their two brothers appeared weekly on a radio program called "Wise Child." In my mind I've always pictured the program something like "College Bowl." Anyway, Zooey is talking to Franny and he says,

"I remember about the fifth time I went on 'Wise Child' I started complaining one night before the broadcast because Seymour told me to shine my shoes. I was furious. The studio audience were all morons, the announcer was a moron, the sponsors were morons and I just wasn't going to shine my shoes for them. I told Seymour. I said they couldn't see me anyway, where we sat. Seymour said to shine my shoes for the fat lady. I didn't know what he was talking about, but he had a very Seymour look on his face and so I did. He never did tell me who the Fat Lady was, but I shined my shoes for her every time I went on the air. This terribly clear, clear picture of the Fat Lady formed in my mind. I had her sitting on this porch all day, swatting flies, with her radio going full blast from morning until night. I figured the heat was terrible and she probably had cancer. Anyway, it

seemed clear why Seymour wanted me to shine my shoes when I went on the air. It made sense. I'll tell you a terrible secret, Franny. Are you listening to me, buddy? There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady. That includes your friends and your enemies and all of the cousins by the dozens. There isn't anyone anywhere that isn't Seymour's Fat Lady. Don't you know that? Don't you know the secret yet? Don't you know who the Fat Lady really is? It's Christ himself, Franny, Christ himself."

Another quote of Salinger that has always meant much to me is this: "All we do the whole of our lives is go from one little piece of holy ground to another."

I can't put all of these ideas into a profound theological statement for you, but for me the basic belief that underlies these ideas can be summarized as follows: All is sacred. Nothing is profane. Everything is of God. Everyone is God. Our task is one of erecting shrines that mark the presence of God living among us and within us. That is what it means to me when I say, "All that we do is of God and for God."

God Needs Us as Much as We Need God

A second element of an apostolic spirituality, I believe, is the realization that God needs us as much as we need God. Abraham Heschel has very much influenced my beliefs about God's dependence on us. However, I think I really began to understand that concept in a concrete way when I was listening to a friend of mine, Mary Ellen Quinn, talk about her trip to the Fiji islands to visit her brother Ed who is a Columban missionary there.

Ed took Mary Ellen around to the very primitive tribal communities that form his parish. In some of these villages Mary Ellen was the first white woman the people had ever met. Mary Ellen said that in the village where Ed lives, the people held a big feast to show their love and respect for Ed. As part of the feast, they gave gifts to Mary Ellen. One of the gifts I recall her mentioning was a whale's tooth, considered a good luck charm.

Now, it is customary in our culture to say "thank you" when gifts are bestowed on us. Among the

people of the Fijian islands, however, the receiver of gifts is expected to remain silent and someone else speaks on his or her behalf. Mary Ellen said that during the course of the meal on man got up to offer her gifts. Then another person got up to accept the gifts. She said the whole exchange was very ritualistic. The first person indicated that he was giving these gifts on behalf of the people. Her representative or "stand in" replied that he could not accept the gifts; they were too grand. The first person then went on to implore the other to accept the gifts and finally, after considerable dialogue, Mary Ellen's representative graciously received the gifts in her name. And all the while Mary Ellen sat there saying nothing.

I mention this story because it struck me when I heard it that in some way that tale describes our role as religious women in the church and world. We are about the task of giving gifts—especially the gifts of Mercy and Justice. We are also women who have received many, many gifts.

Somehow in this whole process of giving and receiving God sits among us, quietly listening, yet confident and hopeful that we will speak the appropriate words of gratitude and bestow the appropriate gifts on life. God's apparent muteness does not come from an inability to speak. Rather, God has chosen to let us speak on his and her behalf.

I am in awe when I reflect on the power God has given us—the power to speak the word of life to our church and our world. In a sense, God needs us as much as we need God. If we refuse to speak, the Word will not be uttered. If we do not invite others to speak, the Word will be less than it could have

been. We have to acknowledge and reverence this gift in each other and in the community. We also must accept the responsibility of being sure that the words we offer to each other and to the world are truly of God.

Nothing is Achieved; Everything is Given

The third component of an apostolic spirituality, for me at least is a deep and abiding belief that

**The one who plants
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nothing is achieved; everything is given. There is an interesting dynamic implied in this statement. On the one hand, God has empowered us to speak the word of life to each other and to the world. On the other hand, we must remember always that we are created by God's gift of life and that the one who builds up can also tear down. The one who plants can also pluck up. God begins history and God ends history. We are at one and the same time powerful people and powerless people.

This theme is pronounced in the words of Walter Brueggemann. In his book *Praying the Psalms*, Brueggemann points out that God is a very gracious God. "God takes folks very seriously and lets us have what we choose. But this God who honors our ways is the same God who overrides our ways." This tension, I believe, lies at the very heart of an apostolic spirituality. God gives us the power to choose our future. At the same time God is also choosing for us a future that is gracious beyond comprehension.

I think the belief and acceptance of this dynamic is what will sustain us in our efforts at systemic change. When we look at the situation in Central America, for example, we can become very discouraged. It seems as if all of our attempts to stop the involvement of the United States in these countries have fallen on deaf ears. What keeps us going, however, is our conviction that no matter what all the data is telling us, we need not accept that as the ultimate reality. The God we know is a God who intrudes from time to time to reverse historical circumstances and destiny. Our trust in this God is what keeps us plugging away even when all seems hopeless.

There is a scripture saying that means a great deal to me in this context. It is from St. Paul's epistle to the Romans 4:11: "Abraham, when hope was dead in him, went on hoping in faith."

Journeying Together to a New Land Known Only to God

The final seed of an apostolic spirituality that I would like to discuss briefly is a belief that we must journey together to that new land known only to God.

One of my favorite gospel stories is that of Jesus healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath. Luke 13:10-14 tells the story this way:

One Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. A woman there had an evil spirit that had kept her sick for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, 'Woman, you are free of your infirmity.' He placed his hand on her, and, at once, she straightened herself up and praised God.

When I was trying to decide a couple of years ago about whether or not to run for another term as provincial, one of the graces of my reflection was the realization of how much I needed the women in our community. Somehow I know my salvation is

intimately connected with the lives of these women. I have experienced pain and disappointment and even rage at times, in my encounters in community. But I also count as one of my greatest gifts, the privilege of journeying to God with such marvelous companions.

All of us in some ways are like that woman bent over and we need to do for each other what Jesus did for her.

We must develop and strengthen our relationship with each other. "Jesus saw her and called out to her."

We must affirm each other as women. "Woman. Woman you are.

Woman, you are free."

We must heal each other. "Woman, you are free of your infirmities."

We must love and support each other. "He placed his hand on her."

And we must invite each other to wholeness and holiness. "He called out to her, 'Woman, you are free of your infirmities. He placed his hand on her and at once, she straightened herself up and praised God.'"

I honestly don't know what our community life will look like in the future. I do believe, that the bonds that exist among us will assure us of that future. We need to provide opportunities for creating stories together and sharing stories together because the story of Mercy began with women who believed in God enough and believed in each other enough to risk journeying together among the poor of Dublin.

And so, I invite you
to go beyond the city
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And so, I invite you to go beyond the city gates. I remind you that the people within are waiting for us to liberate them and renew them and give them hope once more.

Travel as women totally dependent on God and on each other. Travel believing in a vision of a “new heaven and a new earth” where all we know of this life will be inverted, turned upside down.

The blind will see. The lame will walk. The lepers will be cleansed. The deaf will hear. The dead, the lifeless, the forgotten, the margined, will be raised up. And the poor? The poor will have good news, the good life preached to them, given to them, shared with them. (Lk 4:18-19)

Let us bid our last, fond farewell to our past and our present.

We have come far.

We have done much.

Now the road beckons beyond.

And in the words of St. Paul (I Cor. 15:51) “I will tell you something that has been a secret.... We are not going to die, but we shall all be changed.” ♦

Endnote

¹This is the text of Norita Cooney’s Keynote Address, presented at the Convocation of the Sisters of Mercy at Burlingame, California on August 13, 1984.

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**Prayer Delivered to the Senate at the California State Capitol
by Michelle Gorman, R.S.M., Chaplain.**

Good morning, Senators, staff, and guests! Happy New Year to all of you! And thank you, Senator De León for your kind introduction. I am honored to serve as Senate Chaplain, and I see my role as helping you connect what you do on a daily basis to the ongoing progression of our state to a reality where liberty and justice are truly experienced by all.

Before I begin the first prayer of 2015, I'd like to make a few remarks about the God I will be invoking on your behalf. For me, this God

- Is a God of unconditional love and compassion, not only for your constituents, but also for each one of you!
- This God is closer to each one of us than we are to ourselves, and He/She desires to be invited into the daily exigencies of our lives.
- And I also believe that this God has a sense of humor; otherwise, why would a Sister of Mercy be standing here 157 years after Sister Mary Baptist Russell purchased the land on which the Capitol stands, and who, two years later, had to sell it back to you for the same \$4,000 or so that she paid for it! No, we don't want it back, but I like to think that Mary Baptist may have completed some unfinished business, and here I now stand with gratitude and awe at God's mysterious ways!

So, for our prayer today, I invite us to take a few moments to call to mind our ancestors - all those persons who paved the way for this moment of your beginning *the legislative session of 2015*

Let us remember our biological ancestors:

- What struggles did they encounter as they left their beloved homelands? What contributions did they make for our freedom and well-being?

Let us remember our spiritual ancestors:

- What experiences of God did they impart? What hopes and dreams did they inspire in their children?

And let us remember our legislative ancestors:

- What vision did they carry for the Golden State? What personal sacrifices did they make as they laid the foundations of the California that we now administer and serve?

So, gracious and loving God: God of the past, of the present, and of the future: we trust in your presence with us today. We thank you for our ancestors, on whose shoulders we stand and from whose perspective we benefit. We appreciate that this is our time to collaborate with many factors in the advancement of California and the continued creation of a better and safer planet for all.

- May we be patient with the sometimes-slow progression of our plans as we acknowledge that our ancestors also encountered many obstacles.
- May we have the courage to delve into those issues that some tell us are impossible to solve.
- And may we act in visionary ways now so that our descendants in seven generations will thank us for our generosity, for our perseverance, and for our care for the future. We ask this in your name, — AMEN.

Prayer Offered By:

Sister Michelle Gorman, RSM

Prayer Date: Monday, January 5, 2015

Prayer Status: Archived



MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Aline Paris, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. MAST will hold its next Annual Meeting at St. Raphaela Center, Haverford, PA, **June 19-22, 2015**. Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Aline Paris, R.S.M. by e-mail at aparis@csm.edu or by mail at College of St. Mary, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE, 68016.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Marilyn King, R.S.M., 220 Laura Lane, Lebanon, KY, 40033-9162.

Since 1991, The MAST Journal has been published three times a year. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Year of Consecrated Life— 2015

The year of consecrated life began in October of 2014, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of *Lumen gentium*, which has a specific chapter dealing with consecrated life. The anniversary of the Council's decree *Perfectae caritatis* will be the occasion of the close of the year in November, 2015.

Questions for Reflection

Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, posed these questions to the Conference for Major Superiors of Men and to the Leadership Conference for Women Religious.

1. At what point are we to return to the source of every form of Christian life and the founding charisms of our Institutes?
2. Are our institutes adapting in an evangelical way to changing conditions?
3. Is following Christ, as taught in the Gospels, the fundamental norm?
4. Are we faithfully observing the spirit and names of our founders and foundresses so as to preserve their charism?
5. Is *Sentire Cum Ecclesia*, thinking with the Church, a strong feature of our institute? Are we seeking to realize the goals of the church in biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, missionary and social fields?
6. Are all members of our institute made aware of the condition of our times and the needs of the church in such a way as to awaken in them the commitment to living in community with others, animated by a spirit of faith and ardent apostolic zeal?
7. Is each member of our community loved personally, taking into account their physical, spiritual, psychological and cultural conditions?
8. Are obedience and authority dimensions of a life true of the true fraternity amongst us or do they remain instruments of power and enslavement, perhaps disguised by unhealthy spirituality?

Discussion Questions

(Cooney) *"The beliefs I have discovered in my own life and in our life together in Mercy that I think are somehow integral to an apostolic spirituality are these: 1) All that we do is of God and for God. 2) God needs us as much as we need God. 3) Nothing is achieved; all is given. 4) We go together on that journey toward a land known only to God."*

What are the core beliefs, or principles, or simple statements that describe your own apostolic spirituality? What aspects of religious life in the past were life-giving? What were death-dealing? What can never be retrieved or re-instated? What re-expression of religious life is still a "work in progress"?

(Doyle) Catherine selected patrons for the Institute whose lives embodied values she espoused. If she were revising the listing today, who might she include to be spirit guides for Mercy? *"She did not select saints who were cloistered from the world, but ones who were actively engaged in it, who went out into the streets and into the cities. In going out into the world, these saints energetically served their brothers and sisters because they saw in them the living Christ."*

Saints who are acknowledged today as spirit guides for women include contemplatives, such as Juliana of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen and Edith Stein. How would you describe their relation to your own vision and ministry as a Sister of Mercy?

(King) *"It witnesses to ways of relating to others, having possessions, and using power. These touch on impulses that are deep within every human person that can be used or abused. But because the way the vowed religious incarnates the expressions of these impulses—with love, freedom, respect for others—this way of life both fascinates and attracts and challenges. In other words, religious life is prophetic."*

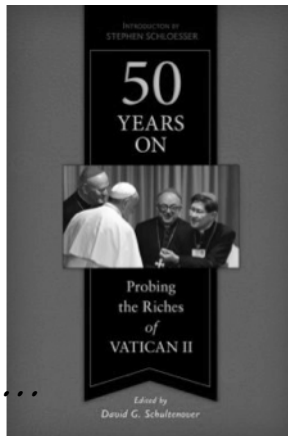
In simple terms, how does chastity describe your "ways of relating to others"; how does poverty describe your "ways of having possessions"; how does obedience describe your "ways of using power"?

(Moran) *"Is life easier than it was fifty years ago? For some of us it was easier when we were just told what to do from the moment we got up at the sound of the bell in the morning, until it was time for the great silence at night. Now we have to pray and carefully consider what our vows and ministry commitments are asking of us. We have to admit when our personal choices may not be the best, and may not be accepted by some of our Sisters. All in all, religious life has always been challenging, and today it requires both maturity and a willingness to admit that we might have made better choices."*

As you reflect on your congregational history, and on your personal history, do you have any regrets about Chapter decisions or personal decisions? What do you see now that you could not have seen at the time that decision was being made?

(Ruffing) *“The ministerial lives of women of Mercy have taken us to never imagined “frontiers” in housing, immigration, women’s issues, water, eco-justice, spiritual direction, pastoral care, contemplative dialogue, ecumenism, and creativity in healthcare and educational ministries. Might we be inspired to work with Francis’ vision and express our reality as women religious in explicitly Christological and gospel language? Might this become a path through the current impasse with some in the hierarchy?”*

What most appeals to you about Pope Francis’ views on and embodiment of religious life? As you look back to Vatican II and the renewal of religious life it promoted, what most affirms religious life as you have lived it or known it, and what is the present challenge for you?



From Vatican II, to.....2015 and beyond...

“The ministerial lives of women of Mercy have taken us to never imagined “frontiers” in housing, immigration, women’s issues, water, eco-justice, spiritual direction, pastoral care, contemplative dialogue, ecumenism, and creativity in healthcare and educational ministries.”



Contributors

Norita Cooney, R.S.M. (West Midwest) who died in 2011 at age 71, was most widely known for her leadership in healthcare. She had a B.A. in history from College of St. Mary, and an M.S. in Sociology from St. Louis University. With an earlier background in education, she chaired the Dept. of Sociology at College of St. Mary, then headed the Pastoral Development Office of the Archdiocese of Omaha (1976-78). She was Provincial for the Province of Omaha (1979-1986), then CEO of Bergan Mercy Health System for 10 years. She was chair of the board for Alegent Healthcare System of Omaha, formed in 1995, with 8 hospitals and 40 clinics in Nebraska and Iowa, while simultaneously serving as vice president of Sisters of Mercy of Omaha. When the community merged to form the West Midwest Community in 2008, Sister Norita was elected its first President. She carried out her presidential responsibilities and re-organizational challenges for 2 ½ years before succumbing to cancer.

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (West Midwest) currently serving as Pastoral Associate and Director of Adult Formation for Holy Spirit Parish in Sacramento. A native Sacramentan, she holds a B.A. in history, an M.A. in educational administration from the University of San Francisco, and an M.A. in liturgical studies from St John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. Katherine served in community leadership from 1994-2004 and was director for Mercy Center Auburn retreat center. She has been engaged in retreat work and spiritual direction for over twenty-five years. In addition to her pastoral duties, Katherine serves in Mercy Spiritual Ministries Outreach, which combines retreat work, spiritual direction, adult faith formation and writing. She is the author of several publications including *Like a Tree by Running Water: The Story of Mary Baptist Russell*.

Michelle Gorman, R.S.M. (West Midwest) left County Mayo, Ireland, in 1971 to enter the Sisters of Mercy in Auburn, California. Her B.A. and lifetime teaching credential are from California State Univ. at Sacramento, and her M.A. in English from Gonzaga Univ. in Spokane, Washington. Her background includes elementary and high school teaching. She has a diploma in spiritual direction from Shalem Institute in Maryland, and she was involved in Mercy vocation ministry for nine years. For two terms, from 2004 to 2012, she served on leadership teams for the Auburn, and West Midwest communities. In 2014, she was appointed Chaplain to the Senate in the California Capitol at Sacramento.

Marilyn King, R.S.M. (West Midwest) received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union with a dissertation on Thomas Merton. She also has a background in teaching math and science. She is co-founder of The Laura, a retreat-house setting in Kentucky that combines contemplation, study and service. She teaches some courses at a local Catholic college, but is mainly a rural theologian, teaching in parishes to ordinary people who lack the cultural and educational advantages of urban residents. She performs many services to the Institute as a theologian, and coordinated the program Opening Worlds of Mercy. She serves on the editorial board of *The MAST Journal*, as Treasurer for the organization, and is a regular contributor of articles.

Barbara Moran, R.S.M. (West Midwest) received her Ph.D. in English literature and linguistics at Catholic University of America with a dissertation on “The Effects of Variation in Direct Address in Four Ancrene Riwe Texts”—documents outlining a way of life for women who lived as hermits associated with parishes in medieval times. She retired from teaching English at University of San Francisco in 1997, and began docent training and volunteer touring at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco that same year. She still serves in a support status. She also volunteers in the library and Spiritual Care department at Alma Via senior residence in San Francisco as well as assisting at Marian Oaks and Mercy Convent as a Eucharistic minister. She has facilitated a Catholic women’s book group for twenty-five years, and just finished reading and discussing Jimmy Carter’s *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power*. In September 2014 she attended the celebration of Mercy International’s 20th Anniversary celebration in Dublin, noting that there was a productive day on women’s issues and human trafficking, a well-recognized issue in Ireland.

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds a Masters in Applied Spirituality from University of San Francisco, a C.T.S. and Licentiate in Sacred Theology from Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She chaired a program in Spirituality and Spiritual Direction at Fordham University from 1986-2009, and became Professor Emerita of Spirituality and Spiritual Direction at Fordham in 2010 when she began her work at Yale Divinity School as Professor of the Practice of Spirituality and Ministerial Leadership. *To Tell the Sacred Tale: Narrative and Spiritual Direction* was published in 2011 by Paulist Press, and twenty essays during her time at Yale on a variety of topics which can be found in PDF files attached to her faculty page at the divinity school.





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