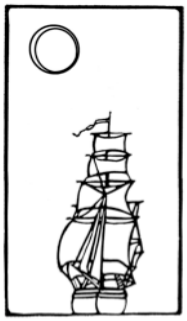

The MAST Journal

The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology

Vol. 27, No. 2 2021

Scripture and Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

This issue is devoted to the scriptural foundation for our Critical Concerns—our ministerial focus on care for the earth, immigration, non-violence, racism and women. These concerns didn't arise out of a politically correct agreement at a Chapter or Assembly, in which we signed onto planks of the U.S.A.'s Democratic party platform. We are women of prayer, liturgical and sacramental life, retreats, and meditation. We have read the scriptures and heard the scriptures as the font of our vocation and spiritual life. This spiritual history has grounded our ministry and the understanding of our charism. Our years of reading and praying scripture has readied us to hear how the word of God is being proclaimed in the churches today. We see that our critical concerns are not new human needs. Ours resonate with those that biblical prophets, theologians, evangelists and pastors prioritized for their contemporaries.

We are women religious in the world, of the world, bent on relieving the suffering of the world. The identification of these particular critical concerns arose out of a long history of our congregational commitments, institutional emphases, church documents, discernment and shifts in our ministries, prayers of petition, individual passions, and compelling needs we recognized as "signs of the times." There is also an admission of the "sins of the times" that called for repentance from societal inaction, and conversion of our energies and focus toward political change. As an Institute with thousands of co-workers, we claim the power we have in numbers, not just to do good deeds today or to relieve one person's suffering, but to effect systemic change. Which of these would Catherine McAuley have initiated? We do not commit ourselves to these needs as though we were inventors of a new project, or the first to recognize the urgency. These critical concerns are commitments to collaborate, to join our energies with others, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The questions posed to writers in this issue were two-fold: How do you understand the practical expression of a particular critical concern? What is the inspiration from scripture that can undergird this particular focus?

Mary Bilderback, R.S.M., a scientist and college professor, writes allusively, literarily and poetically in "Caring for the Earth and All Living Things," starting with the weaving of a spider's web and citation to E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. She invokes the creation account in Genesis and the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. Her decades of collaboration with other women's congregations in taking up environmental causes occurred decades before "care for the earth" was formally adopted as a congregational focus of the Sisters of Mercy.

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., in "Living into Non-Violence: A Mercy Imperative," cites recent events in the U.S.-- the police killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor—as examples of violence we are committed to resist. She identifies three stages of our understanding of non-violence. There are examples of violence in scripture and an image of God as punisher, but that isn't all. Scripture itself transitions to non-violence as a way to protect the innocent from attack by enemies. A non-violent culture and peace-making vision result from a conviction of interconnectedness among all people.

Jean Evans, R.S.M., launches her essay on racism by remembering the effects of apartheid on young Blacks during her years of teaching in South Africa, the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 from prison and the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. In "The Taste of Racism in Scripture," she reviews the Torah mandate to care for the resident alien and foreigner, Jonah's resistance to his mission to Ninevah, Ezra and Nehemiah's effort to restore the religious identity of the post-exilic community, Jesus' response to the ethnic "other," such as the Syro-Phoenician woman and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Kathleen Erickson, R.S.M., offers "Remember That We Are One" on immigration concerns from her experience of months of living at the U.S. border with Mexico, her trips to central America, and her practical education about the plight of Mexican farm-workers in the U.S. and factory workers in Mexico. She calls attention to the negative effects of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) on ordinary laborers. She argues that U.S. trade policy supposedly confers economic benefits on Mexican factory workers, but actually results in their exploitation and denial of just wages.

Mary Criscione, R.S.M., a scripture scholar, provides an overview of biblical statements about "the other" in "Immigration and the Bible: Contesting Perspectives." She guides the reader through accounts of Israel's origins, with boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion, yet the command to protect the alien, widow and orphan. In Israel's history, there are inconsistent and ambiguous attitudes toward the stranger, the foreigner and the sojourner. The gospels refer to tension over inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian household, the experience of both Jesus and Paul as sojourners who are treated as outsiders, and their mission to people who live "someplace else."

Judith Schubert, R.S.M., reviews the heroism and protectiveness of women in "What Can We Learn from Women Saviors Memorialized in Scripture?" Women saved lives, both physically and spiritually. The rescue of Moses involved several courageous and compassionate women—midwives, the mother and sister of Moses, and the Egyptian princess. Sarah protected Abraham in Egypt at a risk to herself. Both the Woman at the Well, and Mary Magdalene were riskers, initiative takers, and missionaries. The biblical record honors savior-women, and our Mercy charism inspires us to act as they did.

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M., focuses on the equality of women in the New Testament. "The Role of Women in the Early Church: Equal in Dignity" takes up controversial passages about women in Paul's authentic letters to the Galatians, First Corinthians and Romans. She argues that Paul named women as ministers, fellow-workers and apostles, the same terms as he described himself. Baptism is the rite that dissolved divisions created by gender, ethnicity and social class. Re-reading Paul's assertion of women's equality through baptism gives theological grounding to Mercy's focus on women.

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., is our beloved historian of Catherine McAuley's life and letters, scholarly researcher of the Mercy charism, and convener of the Mercy International Research Association. We hope the project will be re-convened. She offers two essays independent of the focus on the above five critical concerns. Keeping our congregational history alive is foundational as inspiration for our ministerial focus. "The Value of Archives and Mercy Archival Research" is a short course both for the archivists in the community as well as any number of family genealogists. Where do you start if you have a question

about your family history—or the congregation's history? What we think is securely established, the date of Catherine McAuley's birth, turns out to be inaccurately carved into her gravestone at Baggot Street. Biblical scholars know well the disputes over what sayings in the gospel were actually spoken by Jesus himself—and after two thousand years how can we ever know? Mary Sullivan addresses a similar question about the sayings and instructions of Catherine McAuley—which are genuinely hers, and what ones attributed to her—and how do we know?

In Mary Sullivan's delightful retrieval of Catherine McAuley's own informal writings, "The Poetry of Catherine McAuley: Cheerful Mercifulness," we are treated to our foundress' sense of humor and playfulness left in verses she herself never intended as works of art. These compositions were meant to delight, encourage, entertain, and express affection for her Sisters. No matter how serious our scriptural reflections and definition of our ministerial focus, the lighthearted spirit and counsel of our foundress is always the voice we hear when we "return home."

Yours,

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

The Mast Journal begun in 1991, is published three times a year by
the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology
www.mastrsm.org
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Inc., West Midwest Community
535 Sacramento Street, Auburn, CA 95603.
Vol. 27, No. 2, 2021
Annual Subscription $20 US; $30 International

Caring for the Earth and All Living Things

Mary Bilderback, R.S.M.

Most mornings when the weather is warm and it's not raining torrentially, I receive a gift from the spider world. Sometime in the night or just before dawn an orb spider weaves her web across the rear-view mirror of my car. Today the web is especially charming—strung with opalescent beads of fog. The coastal fog that makes navigation treacherous and obscures the horizon between sky and sea, she factors into her work as adornment. Think of the luminous brocades you've nearly eaten as you passed through a garden lost in your own web of thoughts.

I wonder if she watches herself in the mirror as she weaves, delighting as I do, in her creation.

If I pay attention what does she teach me? I know from research she lays down the dry ropes first, so she can span her alluring creation without getting stuck herself. Then she puts the sticky silks in place to catch her daily bread. Silk pulled from her very own body — consubstantial silk?

Who can encounter a spider without remembering *Charlotte's Web,* that favorite children's book by E. B. White? [1]

In a collaborative effort of compassion, you may recall, a little girl named Fern, a rat named Templeton, and spider Charlotte conspire to save Wilbur, Fern's pet pig from slaughter. Templeton provides words salvaged from old newspapers at the dump for Charlotte to weave into her web, which hangs above Wilbur's pen:

"Some Pig." "Terrific." "Radiant." "Humble."

This is a genuine Saint Francis story. In cahoots with Brother Rat, Sister Spider posts life-saving words to draw attention to Brother Wilbur's plight and imminent doom, as prophesied by the attentive local barnyard community.

All hands on deck. Words to the rescue.

Mercy Earth Harmony Network

Nearly twenty-five years ago a handful of sisters formed the Mercy Earth Harmony Network. Sisters from across our sprawling Institute voiced critical concern about the plight of Mother Earth, her waters, her air, her soils, and all her creatures. We committed ourselves to examine our lives ecologically, and learn how to live in harmony with Earth, who we understood to be the physical source and substance of our very being.

Together numerous congregations of women religious joined to learn about stewardship in light of our expanding evolutionary consciousness. With religious fervor we studied contemporary cosmologists, theoretical physicists and systematic biologists who were puzzling out the universe we live in; we questioned our own human place and role. We created projects designed to educate our communities and the general public about the need to protect and advocate on behalf of the land and waters we had always taken for granted, the land and waters we now knew we belonged to, and came under our care.

Sisters from across our sprawling Institute voiced critical concern about the plight of Mother Earth, her waters, her air, her soils, and all her creatures.

When it was published in 2000, we brought the *Earth Charter* into our science classrooms; we traveled the globe to take part in United Nations sponsored Earth Summits; we signed onto the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*.

Groups like ROW (Religious on Water) and Water Spirit, in partnership with local NGOs (Clean Ocean Action and the Alliance for the

Living Ocean) focused on the Mid Atlantic coastal waters. ROAR (Religious Organizations Along the River) engaged communities in the Hudson River Valley. Our retreat houses and universities hosted Water Conferences, and Land Trust workshops. Today these organizations have evolved and continue to thrive, wholeheartedly sharing the eco-spiritual stage with many others.

Our increasing curiosity and care continues to expand our spirituality as we place scientifically-informed perspectives alongside the creation stories we learned from scripture as children.

Revelation of Earth's History

Equipped with the ever-evolving tools of science and technology, human curiosity is able to peer back beyond the stories recorded on cuneiform tablets and parchment scrolls into nearly 14 billion years of gritty evidence with which to face the mysteries of existence. The universe itself, when questioned, is revelatory. We've learned to open stars and rocks and water like textbooks.

We belong to a delicately functional family of creatures who've successfully evolved over 3.8 billion years …

Living Earth herself reveals the story of life, in which we see our human species as a tribe of exquisitely fashioned animals. We belong to a delicately functional family of creatures who've successfully evolved over 3.8 billion years together — from microscopic cells to immense blue whales — each form enfolding a unique, invaluable player.

The uniqueness of humans certainly includes the capacity to marvel at our cosmic existence. Like no other species we ask huge reverberating questions about who we are, where we come from. We write up plausible stories that generate meaning and underwrite our behavior.

Dysfunctional stories can be hacked by new information. In response we continually deepen our investigations, from humbler and humbler human centers of gravity.

Today, our Mercy Institute continues on a "journey of oneness." Our mission aims to mirror the interconnected, ever-evolving reality in which we are embedded. Care for Earth is featured in the 2017 Chapter Recommitment Statement as one of our five, seamless, critical concerns. In response to God's call, we commit ourselves to on-going "ecological conversion," actively seeking ways to co-celebrate our communion with Earth, our Mother, our Sister, our common home.

A couple of decades ago, Sandra Schneiders captured the inspiration for our care for the earth:

> That which one seeks in a profound sense is the motive force of one's actions, and this explains the radical incompatibility between seeking one's own glory and being open to God's revelation. Only the person who truly seeks the glory of God can be open to the totally unexpected, even to that which calls into question one's understanding of sacred traditions and institutions and relativizes the laws and practices that have seemed absolute. Only a total and single-minded determination to seek God above all things, regardless of where the divine invitation leads, can enable a person to move beyond absolute reliance on the secure structures of religious institutions and allow God to be God in one's life. [2]

Historically, when pursuing ontological investigations, humanity has looked to its varied cultural roots where astonishing origin stories abound. Every culture has one, both colorfully unique, and strikingly similar in many ways. These master narratives have provided meaning and instructed subscribers on how to live, encoded their rights and responsibilities. The religions of the world have provided ground under our meandering feet.

When we look in Christian Scripture, the Book of Genesis gives us an account of creation.

We all know the timeline — what God wrought on the first 6 days:

Lights in the dome of the sky; waters teaming with sea creatures; birds and cattle and creeping things; wild animals of all kinds. And when God stepped back and gazed, God "saw how good it was."

And then God created humankind. "Be fertile and multiply," God said, "fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion...."

And so it happened, "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" **(**Gen. 1**:** 14-28).

So on the 7th day God rested.

But on the 8th day God smelled smoke.

Pope Francis and *Praise Be to You: Care for Our Common Home*

In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis expresses grave concern for the plight of Earth — for the whole intricate brocade of life brought forth from Earth's own body.

Pope Francis smells smoke.

"We have come to see ourselves as her (Earth's) lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will... We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth... our very bodies are made of her elements." (*Laudato Si'* § 2)

The story of creation is far from over.

Today along with other religious leaders, Pope Francis acknowledges the discoveries of science and encourages Christians to "realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith." (*Laudato Si'* §64 **)**

He takes seriously the alarms scientists are sounding. Earth's natural operating systems are being interrupted. The very way life breathes, drinks, eats, and gives birth to new life is being disrupted. Verifiable evidence points to one species' ignor-ant misappropriation of what it considers "resources" to be the cause.

There are no such things as resources on a symbiotic planet where all that exists is woven seamlessly together. Time to rethink dominion. All hands and hearts and minds on deck:

"No branch of science and no form of wisdom can be left out..." (*Laudato Si' §63)*

In fact, radiant dust in every form is crucial. Cyanobacteria show us how to dine on sunlight; fungi prototyped the first world-wide web; earthworms compost, and spiders recycle. Birds, pigs, whales, artists, farmers, spiritual teachers, children, barefoot seekers in all shapes and sizes, from all disciplines and faiths.

"We need a new theology of the cosmos, one that is grounded in the best science of our day... so that all the world turns sacred again...."

As Beatrice Bruteau affirms in *God's Ecstasy*,

"We need a new theology of the cosmos, one that is grounded in the best science of our day... so that all the world turns sacred again...." [3]

Recommendation of Non-Beach Reading

It's not beach reading — more of a precarious romp, or an extreme sports marathon — but I highly recommend Sean Carroll's *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning, and the Universe Itself.* When it first came out in 2016, I sent a copy to a physicist friend with the caveat that I expected a tutorial on the hard parts. She never got back to me, so I plunged in without benefit of a degree in physics, and 470 pages later I was unabashedly stunned, but by no means sorry.

Carroll starts out referencing Wile E. Coyote, protagonist of the old Road Runner cartoons. Recall how he would find himself scooting off the

edge of a cliff and continue running on thin air until it registers that he had lost the ground under his feet, and then decidedly alert, he would immediately plummet downward. Splat — complete with all the zany cartoon graphics — manic dust flying and our coyote friend seeing technicolor stars.

> We are all Wile E. Coyote," Carroll confesses on page one. "Since human beings began thinking about things, we have contemplated our place in the universe, the reason why we are all here. Many possible answers have been put forth, and partisans of one view or another have occasionally disagreed with each other. But for a long time, there has been a shared view that there is some meaning, out there somewhere, waiting to be discovered and acknowledged.[4]

We've lived with the assumption that the Universe and our place in it was known, in a reassuringly predictable way; that things happened for discernible reasons; that there was a desirable, collectible payoff to our existence. That belief, in itself, gave us purposive momentum... even if we ended up zooming off a cliff — as we seem to be doing right now with all our unexamined assumptions, and dysfunctional infrastructures close behind.

What's eroding the familiar ground under our feet? Who's hacking into our habitual operating systems — tweaking man-made weary algorithms — creating space for a nimbler, more inclusive, more expansive story — "one that is breathtaking and exhilarating in many ways, challenging and vexing in others?"

Relationship of Humans to Animate and Inanimate Creation

In E.B. White's story, Fern's mother is concerned that her daughter is spending too much time in the barnyard with "talking" animals, and consults the family doctor. Mrs. Arable asks him if he's heard about the words appearing in the spider's web. He says he has.

"Well do you understand it? Mrs. Arable asked.

"Understand what?"

"Do you understand how there could be any writing in a spider's web?"

"Oh, no, I don't understand it. But for that matter I don't understand how a spider learned to spin a web in the first place. When the words appeared, everyone said they were a miracle. But nobody pointed out that the web itself is a miracle."

Their conversation ends when Mrs. Arable admits she doesn't like what she can't understand and Dr. Dorian agrees: "I'm a doctor, I'm supposed to understand everything. But I don't understand everything, and I don't intend to let that worry me."[5]

To date there is no scientific theory of everything. The quarrel between quantum mechanics, describing the microscopic material world, and the general theory of relativity, describing the macroscopic material world, goes on.

Nor can cosmologists tell us how the universe began, or even if there isn't more than one — although grand hypotheses abound. Biologists still can't tell us how life began, although several plausible ideas are under consideration.

Consciousness itself remains an enigma. What exactly is it; how did it emerge; is it something we share with other mammals, with spiders, trees, rocks, or electrons? Or is consciousness actually the underlying reality out of which all else arises, and lives and moves and has its being? So much remains as an alluring mystery Our questions routinely overshoot both the solid physical and absolute metaphysical cliff of certainty. It's tricky making headway on thin air — especially moving at the break-neck pace we're used to.

And for months now, many orders of magnitude smaller than a solicitous spider, a virus

has been leaving messages —pointing out the flimsy social web we've woven; pointing to how many of us get stuck on its sticky ropes, or fall through its holes of ignor-ance and unintended consequences.

We're off the cliff and lost and truly know we're falling; we're grasping for any available holdfast, and making up stories on our way down. We're praying for return to normal with a soft landing on solid ground — when we could be trying out our still moist wings.

When you're lost, the poet David Wagoner says: "Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you/ Are not lost...The forest knows/ Where you are. You must let it find you."[6]

Vision of Pope Francis

Pope Francis smells smoke. He points to disappearing forests; to stolen water, air, soil; to Earth herself: Our mother, our sister, our home. Is it any wonder we feel lost?

Pope Francis looks at Jesus. "Jesus lived in full harmony with creation." (*Laudato Si' §* 98)

In section VII of *Laudato Si',* the "Gaze of Jesus," Pope Francis describes Jesus as being "in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder." (*Laudato Si' §.* 97)

As he moved about the countryside, Jesus took every opportunity to stop and bear Earth's beauty; he invited his companions to read wisdom in mustard seeds and fig trees. We all can quote his lessons from the lives of lilies, and acknowledge the preciousness of sparrows. The gospels are adorned with parables drawn from every niche in the natural world. He served food, and ate and drank and laughed and wept. He stepped aside; he stood still.

"When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So, they said to one another, 'Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be'" (Jn. 19: 23-24).

What shall we make of the seamless garment Jesus wore? Who draws the lot and wins it?

Prayer and Reflection

In gratitude we stop, and pray.
Incarnate God, with you we breathe one air,
we eat one bread, we drink one water
— as miraculous as wine.
We share your seamless garment woven
new each day.

This evening out my window I can see a storm moving in from the northeast like a heavy arm pulling a dark drape over the sea. In the west the sun infuses the mudflats with this day's last light.

When you're lost, the poet David Wagoner says: "Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you/ Are not lost...The forest knows/ Where you are. You must let it find you."

I go down to check my spider. She's gone backstage for the night. She's left me no wise words, but the brilliant setting sun is caught, for a moment, in the mirror behind the web she wove today. I snip an October daisy (blooming so early this year) for my desk. I think I'll eat a sweet potato and search an old notebook till I fall asleep. I've been looking for a line I read once about not knowing. I think it belongs to a W.S. Merwin poem. It goes like this: "If we only knew, if we only knew, the stars would look to us to guide them."

In all humility, placing our choice of cosmological this and theological that aside, the Universe we live in seems to be precisely, best explained as a verb: a *giving*. Where it came from may be none of our business, but it's thrilling to search *everywhere* for clues.

Where the universe is going may depend on the story we humans choose to live by. Or so we'd like to think. But who knows?

I can't imagine a God —capable of giving us each other, and this whole seamless world —not wanting to be as surprised as we are to discover who, in God's eyes, we are —as we learn to tend the flow of grace with mercy. Can you?◆

Endnotes

[1]E.B.White, *Charlotte's Web* (New York: Harper Collins, Inc, 1952).
[2] Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1999): 86.
[3] Beatrice Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy: The Creation of Self-Creating World.* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1997): 13.
[4] *Charlotte's Web,* p. 110.
[5] Sean Carroll, *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning, and the Universe Itself.* (*Dutton*, New York, NY, 2016): 9.
[6] Wagoner, David. "Lost" *Poetry Magazine*, July 1971.

Subscriptions and correspondence to Julia Upton, R.S.M., 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791. Email: jupton@sistersofmercy.org.

Manuscript submissions to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. at 1600 Petersen Ave. #40, San Jose, CA 95129. Email: eloros@sbcglobal.net.

Ellen Smith, R.S.M. layout, and printing by Firespring, Omaha, NE.

Remember That We Are One

Kathleen Erickson, R.S.M.

2020 is a year none of us will ever forget. The whole world seems askew: polarization, violence, racism, climate crisis, and a global pandemic to cope with. What follows is a partial chronicle of a deepening awareness of inequality and injustice in the world as seen through the lens of the Mercy concern of immigration and my involvement in that issue.

In 2005, when the Sisters of Mercy community identified five Critical Concerns, we saw that **Immigration** reveals the commitments among us. **Racism** lurks beneath the colonization of other countries and subsequent treatment of minorities, immigrants and refugees. **Women** suffer disproportionately in the process of migration, as rape and other forms of **Violence** impel departure from their homes and are a horrific factor on the journey to escape. The **Environmental** crisis exacerbates the need to migrate. Fifteen years ago, we could not have imagined how immigrants would fare in 2020.

Oblivion and Innocence

In retrospect, I believe we were part of a shared national oblivion that most of us didn't realize existed. It is said that the two feet of Catholic Social Teaching are Charity and Justice, but Charity is easier than the excruciating struggle for Justice, which involves challenging the way we were taught to understand the world. So much needs to change as we process the growing awareness of systemic injustice and prejudice that are part of human history.

So much needs to change as we process the growing awareness of systemic injustice and prejudice that are part of human history.

Bishop Mark Seitz wrote a pastoral letter to the people of El Paso after the 2019 Walmart shooting. Titled "Night Will Be No More" (found on the Hope Border Institute website) he describes the border wall as an open wound between the U.S. and Mexico which deepens racially-charged perceptions, and refers to James Baldwin's fear that *Americans are addicted to innocence.*

I think it is an innocence that is the result of oblivion. Most of us grew up with a view of the U.S. that wasn't real. The pandemic has ripped the oblivion to shreds, exposing deep systemic inequality and racism. We see who benefits from that inequality. This realization can be quite dramatic, like a sudden conversion, or a life-long process.

Living at the Border

When someone suggested I participate in a Witness for Peace trip to Nicaragua in 1985, for example, I didn't know where Nicaragua was nor why I would want to go there. That trip provided my first inkling of the effect of U.S. foreign policy when it was supporting oppressive governments. This devastating awakening created the impetus for my decisions to study Spanish and move with two other Mercys in 1991 to the U.S.-Mexican border near El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. I knew little about the effects of colonization. I had never heard of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Living at the border provided me some understanding of historic fluctuations of policies and practices related to immigrants, needed as labor and then made unwelcome. The people we worked with told us, "We have a saying: We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." I had never thought about the implications of the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, significant parts of U.S. history worth exploring.

Farmworkers crossed the border to do seasonal field work. It was not an open border, but when people were stopped and sent back to Mexico with a stern warning, crossing back into the U.S. was relatively easy. After all, U.S. companies recruited workers from Mexico, and some stayed in the U.S. to keep the family together, buy homes and enroll their children in school. Some achieved citizenship. Many didn't bother, as it was rare to be asked for papers.

Numbers of immigrants increased, and Border Patrol presence expanded, as did a feeling of unease among immigrants. In the 1980s and 1990s, Guatemalans and Salvadorans were coming to the U.S. seeking asylum because of wars and conflict in those countries. The immigrant shelters in El Paso were full, but we in the United States were for the most part ignorant of U.S. involvement in Latin American affairs. This changed from time to time when church people were murdered in Latin America for raising questions about justice and teaching local communities about their dignity and their human rights.

The U.S. response to growing numbers of desperate people trying to escape didn't seem to involve awareness of such root causes of immigration.

Effect of Industrial Parks and Trade

U.S. corporations established *maquiladoras* (landscaped and guarded assembly plants such as Ford, General Motors, Zenith and others) modeled after industrial districts in the U.S. In Juarez, the workers lived in shacks around the periphery of the city. Corporations lured families to border cities for jobs, paid poverty-level wages and increased their profit margins. Many in the U.S. bought "American–made" cars, not knowing they were assembled south of the U.S. border.

In the 1990s, groups traveled to the U.S.-Mexican border to learn about immigration issues. Students and parishioners saw the industrial parks as well as the poverty-- that U.S. consumerism exacerbates the economic plight of workers while it benefits us as consumers. They analyzed salaries paid at the *maquilas* compared to similar jobs in the U.S. Recognition of U.S. corporate greed and our own complicity was uncomfortable.

When NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) went into effect in 1994, wages in Mexico declined 40-50% while the cost of living there rose. U.S. and other corporations did business more freely in Mexico. Over time more than 20,000 small and medium Mexican businesses failed, as did many small farms. Drug cartels added to a rise in violence and desperation in Latin America.

The U.S. is a major drug market. The 2009 overthrow of the Honduran president, approved by President Obama and Hillary Clinton, created chaos in Honduras (which Sisters of Mercy witnessed and endured). The political distress was another factor forcing people to migrate.

Treatment and Mis-Treatment of Immigrants

The U.S. response to growing numbers of desperate people trying to escape didn't seem to involve awareness of such root causes of immigration. It did involve ground sensors, night lights, more border patrol agents and border fences. Migrants died crossing the desert or the Rio Grande River. The 9/11 attack on the U.S. in 2001 had increased militarization of the border and resulted in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which spear-headed an all-out effort to keep a powerful country safe. The focus however, turned on poor and uprooted people, fingerprinting and entering them into a database. This was justified in the name of national security.

As the flow of migrants increased, detention became a deterrent, a shock, especially for women who had never imagined being strip-searched, given prison uniforms and locked away from their

families. ICE agents (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) also began seeking out undocumented people living in the U.S.

Visiting immigrant women in the Federal Detention Center in El Paso was a visceral experience of oneness for me. I knew, "This is not just her despair. It's my despair; it's all of our despair." That despair escalated when the Obama administration made the decision to detain families, meaning one parent and the children. For-profit prison corporations saw a golden opportunity to make billions of dollars detaining immigrants in a more palatable way.

The South Texas Family Residential Center, where I served as the interim chaplain for two months in 2015, was built by Correctional Corporation of America to house 3,500 women and children. Although a better living situation than the detention center, it was still a prison. It caused serious psychological trauma to women and their children who were held for indefinite amounts of time. Almost all had family member sponsors in the US, but many were deported anyway. Since most had fled to escape extortion, threats, and kidnapping by drug cartels, those deportations were unconscionable. Advocates pleaded with ICE, the Obama administration and Congress, to stop this travesty of justice. It continues and has worsened.

Immigrants and the Trump Administration

After the 2016 election (with part of Trump's appeal based on the building of a "beautiful wall") thousands of immigrants heading to the U.S. for help were met with tear gas and guns. If they did cross the border seeking asylum, which is a legal right, they were held in inhumane crowded conditions. For months in 2019, detention centers were overwhelmed. Families were separated, and few records kept of where children were sent.

Then ICE, after they apprehended and processed asylum-seekers, began taking them to U.S. shelters where they were cared for. Volunteers and donations from all over the country appeared. Churches, families and other social groups made and served meals, gave out clothing and welcomed frightened and exhausted people asking for our help.

That November, the Trump administration in violation of international agreement enacted the policy of "Remain in Mexico," forbidding asylum seekers to enter this country. Along the border in Mexico the equivalent of refugee camps sprang up. Again, the U.S. response was generous: tents, blankets, makeshift shelters and food. Desperate families now wait for months for a court date that is often postponed or done electronically without translation. The asylum system in this country has been dis-assembled. Planes fly deportees to El Salvador or Guatemala regardless of the home country of the people on board. Thousands of families will never be reunited. Physicians and mental health workers warn of the lasting damage of family separation and detention of children. The pandemic puts immigrants at great risk in detention, with some dying or being deported even though sick with COVID-19.

The human race seems caught in polarization, racism and hatred.

Broader Context of Immigration Issue

Immigration is truly a critical concern because it addresses the situation of vulnerable people suffering needless cruelty. Around the world, refugee camps have become long-term homes for millions of people who have nowhere to be, no place they are welcome. The human race seems caught in polarization, racism and hatred. On TV we have seen people drowning off the coast of Italy, and a father with his young daughter drowned together in the Rio Grande River. What

we witness is a crisis in the soul of humanity. Growing recognition of that truth impels us to examine our part in it.

We are haunted by the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40 "What you did to these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me." We are called to probe the meaning of that message and our own call to oneness.

Sr. Deidre Mullen, R.S.M., executive director of Mercy Global Concerns at the U.N. for more than ten years, writes in her presentation *Until All Have Enough*,[1] "Religious communities have done more than any others to make us aware of the sheer scale of human suffering in our world, and of our duty to end it."

Many of us have worked to raise awareness, lobbied Congress, given talks, written articles, participated in peaceful actions, and gotten arrested. Some have initiated programs visiting detained immigrants and caring for them in shelters and other venues. To paraphrase the words of Sr. Elise D. Garcia, O.P.: Our species is called to no less than a profound transformation at this singular moment in the arc of human history. At its base is a spiritual call to awaken to the sacredness, interdependence and interconnectedness of all life. She goes on to say:

> For decades — thanks to visionaries like Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Miriam Therese MacGillis, Beatrice Bruteau, Ivone Gebara, Ilia Delio, among others — women religious and other seekers have been spiritually enriched by new understandings of our evolving consciousness and place as humans in the 13.8 billion-year unfolding story of the universe. These new understandings of an incomprehensibly large universe that continues to expand and evolve as a single interconnected community reveal the unfathomable mystery of God in our midst. They heighten our awareness of the preciousness of life, in all its diversity and day-to-day particularity, on our majestic blue-green planet, orbiting in the immensity of space."[2]

Religious communities have done more than any others to make us aware of the sheer scale of human suffering in our world, and of our duty to end it.

Our sincerity, our generosity as individuals and communally is not in question as we struggle to understand and to live out the words of John: "God is love and anyone who lives in love is living with God and God is living in them." (1 John 4:16)

Community Directions

I believe the Mercy community is called to a deeper understanding of the connections between Charity and Justice even as we acknowledge fewer numbers and issues of age and diminishment. We need to talk with each other more and struggle against our defensiveness as we look at our own lifestyles and security, and wonder what change is possible. In a recent on-line issue of "Mercy Now" two new members shared a conversation about their attraction to Mercy. When one said, "They (Sisters of Mercy) are fearless, they speak truth to power, stand up to injustice," my heart soared.

I want her perception to be true, and myself to be fearless. However, when I recently wrote a letter to an editor challenging U.S. attitudes toward our history with immigration, it drew an angry reaction from a friend. I found that hard and was reminded again that charity or helping others is more rewarding than questioning the status quo.

In this time of extremes, I urge everyone to continue to respond to the spiritual call to go deeper in our work to understand evolving consciousness. Individually and together, we must learn more about systems, acknowledge how they benefit us, and what we can help to change. What is the extreme of love? What does it mean that God is Love?

Maybe if small groups of us decided to

explore such things as colonization, the Doctrine of Discovery, the history of racism in this country, if we read Deidre Mullen's article and other excellent resources at our disposal, and wrestled with some of the concepts, we might be newly energized. Even using Zoom, we might invite others, family and friends, former students, and donors to participate in conversations about the unfathomable presence of God in our lives. Or to participate in the political process.

We might recognize our own energy and responsibility to send love and light into the world, along with prayer, to *be* love. We could decide to respond to prayers of petition on behalf of immigrants, protesters, white supremacists, government decision-makers with "Remember that we are one."◆

Endnotes

[1] Deirdre Mullan, "Until All Have Enough," Presentation at World and National Perspectives on Poverty and the Vow of Poverty, January 25, 2011, accessed online at https://www.duq.edu/Documents/spiritans/_pdf/Poverty%20and%20Vow%20of%20Poverty.pdf

[2] Elise D. Garcia, "Instead of a 'return to normal,' let's pursue a profound transformation" in *Earthbeat*, *National Catholic Reporter* (May 20, 2020) online.

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. This work is meant to serve women, the Church, and the Institute.

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. Julia Upton, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. **The Annual Meeting of MAST will not be held in person at Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, North Carolina because of COVID 19 restrictions this year. Instead, the MAST meeting will be held virtually via ZOOM on Friday, June 11, 2021 and Saturday June 12, 2021. Attendees will need to register in order to be provided with the ZOOM link. There will be no registration cost.**

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, Julia Upton, R.S.M. by e-mail at jupton@sistersofmercy.org or by mail at St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent RD, Syosset, NY 11791-3863.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., Holy Spirit Convent, 3920 West Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822-1123. E-mail is mkdoyle@mercywmw.org.

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

Immigration and the Bible: Contesting Perspectives

Mary Criscione, R.S.M.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. – Leviticus 19:18

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God. – Leviticus 19:33-34

Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public. – Cornel West

Biblical Voices: Multiple, Patriarchal

As with most issues brought to the Bible, the topic of immigration receives no simple, single point of resolution. Rather, multiple voices and viewpoints can be found in the biblical corpus, a variegated anthology spanning several centuries and social-political cultures. Who is "other" or "stranger" to whom, and on what basis? How is the "sojourner" to be treated as opposed to the "foreigner"? Should the "holy people" exclude or include the "non-holy" in their midst? Are all strangers to be welcomed, or only some? Such questions receive differing and sometimes contradictory answers in the Bible. Rather than seeking some easy formula of "the Bible says this" about immigration, we need to recognize the complexity of the biblical witness and to let such diversity prompt our own reflection and choices. What John J. Collins said about the composite nature of the Torah/Pentateuch can apply as well to our consideration of the Bible as a whole:

> [The final biblical editors] let stand material with diverse points of view, and were content to add their own distinctive emphases to the mix. The biblical text that resulted from this process is not a systematic treatise. Rather, it is a collection of traditional materials that places different viewpoints in dialogue with one another and offers the reader a range of points of view. It is not a text that lends itself to imposing orthodoxy, or even orthopraxy. . . Rather, it should stimulate reflection and debate by the unreconciled diversity of its content.[1]

Rather than seeking some easy formula of "the Bible says this" about immigration, we need to recognize the complexity of the biblical witness and to let such diversity prompt our own reflection and choices.

In addition to the diversity of voices, another factor complicates easy application to today's issues: almost all of these voices speak from the patriarchal male perspective. Not only are women's perspectives seldom considered, but also missing are those of non-elites in general, whatever their gender.[2] So, for example, episodes featuring hospitality to strangers typically revolve around issues of male honor, for both the host and the guest, and the wives, daughters, and servants are presented as ancillary and subject to the will of the household head. Thus, Lot proposes offering his virgin daughters to the violent mob to protect his male guests' inviolability (Gen. 19:6-8).[3] In the story of Ruth, both she and Naomi demonstrate bold initiative and agency, but they are subject to the determination of male elders regarding male property rights and male lineage for their ultimate fate. These examples indicate the underlying patriarchal assumptions inscribed within the biblical texts, and suggest that we take a critical

vantage point in interpreting and applying implications for today. Impetus for liberating praxis today can be found within the Bible, but not without critical and judicious caveats.

Myths of Origin

The composite traditions of the Hebrew Bible include myths of origin, the foundational stories of the beginnings that serve as paradigms for the later community. In the stories of the founding patriarchs and matriarchs, sojourning is a continued motif. Abraham and Sarah are themselves foreigners, immigrants to Canaan, who sojourn throughout Canaan and in Egypt. When Sarah dies, Abraham identifies himself as a resident alien who must seek to buy a burial plot from the Hittites (Gen. 23:4ff). Similar patterns of pastoral movement and sojourning recur in the following tales told of their descendants, concluding with Jacob/Israel migrating to Egypt with the whole extended household. Thus, Israel's origin story is inscribed with descent from original foreigners who settle in the territory of "others," some of whom are depicted as hostile while some as hospitable. Probably edited if not composed in the post-exilic period, such founding myths bear the ambiguity of homeland/chosen land, foreign/native, assimilating/resisting in the territory of "others."

Thus, Israel's origin story is inscribed with descent from original foreigners who settle in the territory of "others," some of whom are depicted as hostile while some as hospitable.

In addition to the myths of the founding ancestors, the story of the exodus out of Egypt serves as another myth of origin. Here, too, ambiguity and complexity remain. Egypt had been the site of refuge for earlier ancestors facing famine; now it is the site of oppression: the Israelite foreigners previously welcomed are now enslaved. Pharaoh's extraordinary lethal power is undermined by women, first by the Hebrew midwives and then by Pharaoh's own daughter—and so the story of liberation can go forward, thanks to cooperative non-Israelites. Supportive "others" are also depicted in the Midianites among whom Moses stays. Marrying and having a son with the Midianite Zipporah, Moses names their son, "Gershom," for he said, "I am a stranger (*ger*) residing in a foreign land" (Ex. 2:22). Sojourning among other peoples—both hostile and hospitable—is a crucial part of the exodus story as well. Again, the exilic and post-exilic community could find a hopeful compass in such a story of deliverance from hostile foreign territory with the aid of cooperative other peoples.

Egypt's ambiguous symbolic role as site of refuge **and** of oppression is reflected in Deuteronomy 23:4-9, where the question is which foreigners can be welcomed into the decision-making "assembly of the LORD." (Note: males only.) On the one hand, Ammonites and Moabites are to be excluded from Israel's assembly, for having failed to provide provisions to the Israelites who had fled Egypt. But Egyptians **can** be welcomed, for earlier having hosted Israel's sojourning ancestors (23:9). In a similar way, the symbolic story of Jesus' family fleeing to Egypt in Matthew's infancy narrative (Matt. 2:13-21) recapitulates the dual refuge/liberation association with Egypt: as in the myths of origins, Jesus' family finds sanctuary in Egypt, and as in the exodus story, they are called "out of Egypt" back to freedom and homeland.

Degrees of Otherness

The origin stories of the ancestors and of the exodus feature the covenant people as being sojourners themselves. The law collections in the Torah reflect this memory of sojourn while also dealing with those who now sojourn among the people of Israel, a reversal of host and foreigner

roles. Assuming the position of Israel being settled in their own land, these collections of laws include consideration of how to deal with foreign "others" now residing among them. Distinction is made here between the sojourner (the stranger or "alien" who takes up residence, Hebrew *ger*) and the foreigner (Hebrew *nokri*), who remains at more of a distance from ongoing involvement in and dependence upon the local cult and economy, or who is from a group seen as historically or potentially hostile. The sojourners/resident aliens are given avenues of legal, cultic, and economic participation (e.g. bringing ritual offerings and observing feasts, making business transactions, including owning Israelite slaves), and both resident stranger and citizen are subject to the same law (Ex. 12:49). Sojourners are to be treated equally with the Israelites when it comes to fair practices (e.g. Deut. 24:14). Such examples indicate a degree of assimilation and integration available for the resident alien. However, also within the biblical writings, the sojourner is often grouped together with the orphan, the widow, and the poor, as among the most vulnerable socially and in need of special protection from destitution and exploitation (e.g. Ex. 22:20-21, Lev. 23:22, Deut. 24:17, Ps. 94:6, Jer. 7:6, Zech 7:10.). This concern for the marginalized extending to the *ger* is an often highlighted feature of Israel's law and of Israel's God, who both mandates and models care of the widow, orphan, stranger (Deut. 10:18, Psalm 146:9). But it points as well to the insecure and lower social standing of the sojourner who seeks to abide among the community. In the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath, the resident stranger is listed last of all–after children, slaves, and work animals (Ex. 20:10).

Throughout the legal and economic considerations mentioned for resident strangers, one key reason is repeated: "for you too were strangers in the land of Egypt." This reminder of ancestral storyline aims to motivate compassion and fairness for those strangers now present among them, as well as to remind of the graciousness of God in choosing to act on behalf of the "nobodies" that the community once was themselves: "remember where you came from." Not only is this a call to humility before God, it is also a mandate to act accordingly. In the theological picture given in Deuteronomy 10:12-22, the awesome divine reality is enumerated, with justice and compassion for the orphan, widow, and sojourner given central position:

> For the LORD, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing. So, you too should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:17-19)

As part of the marginalized socially vulnerable in the community, resident aliens receive divine justice and mercy: this is what God's love for the sojourner looks like.

This double theological-ethical assertion—of divine choice and of human responsibility—is the fulcrum for the Torah and the Prophets: "this is how God acts; therefore, this is how you should act." As part of the marginalized socially vulnerable in the community, resident aliens receive divine justice and mercy: this is what God's love for the sojourner looks like. And as a consequence, this is what the community's love for the resident stranger must look like as well: just and fair treatment, and compassionate provision for needs.

But can they be fully included into the community?

Inclusion/Exclusion and the Community of God's Chosen

How and whether God's chosen people are to include foreign "others" are questions extending acutely in the post-exilic community. The fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C.E. and the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C.E. ushered in waves of successive foreign imperial occupation and domination of God's people that would last for centuries; after the Babylonian empire came the Persian empire, then the Greeks, then the Roman imperial rule. The "promised land" had become the foreign-subjugated land. How should the promises made by God to ancestors be understood in such a foreign-dominated context? Are God's chosen people still chosen, and if so, how should they relate to the non-Judean "nations," the "Gentiles"? Various and differing responses are voiced in the biblical texts.

The primary response seems to have been the editing and production of the Torah itself, with the various strands of (possibly) pre-exilic traditions and exilic compositions combined into the law pronounced by Ezra. In the narratives and laws of the Torah an organizing identity for God's holy people could be provided, in the midst of and under the rule of foreigners. Handing on, discussing, and living by the Torah ("Instruction," laws for life) would constitute the basic code of communal identity and ethics for the people of Israel. But this basic code contained multiplicity, and so various emphases and differing applications kept developing.

When it came to the question of foreigners' inclusion into the community of Israel, the holy people, Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13 exemplify the emphasis upon strict separation of foreigners from the post-exilic Jewish community. In Ezra 10, in order to preserve the purity of Jewish identity, foreign (non-Jewish) wives are to be divorced, and they and their children sent away. This idea of strict separation of holy and unholy aims to preserve both ritual and ethnic integrity and proceeds from a notion of the God of Israel as demanding a holy and separate people as the chosen ones.

A different theological emphasis and communal possibility is suggested in other exilic and post-exilic works. In these works, an understanding of God as universal creator leads to a more inclusive view of Gentiles. Over against the denial of intermarriage, the story of Ruth is crafted to paint a foreigner—a Moabite no less—as not only included into the community but becoming the great-grandmother of King David. The parabolic tale of Jonah depicts the capital of pagan Assyria, Nineveh, as object of God's concern and mercy, much to Jonah's chagrin. Second Isaiah had envisioned Israel as a "light to the nations" (the Gentiles) so that God's salvation "may reach to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6); and Third Isaiah envisions foreigners as part of the covenant community, "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for **all** peoples" (Is. 56:6-7).

The early decades of the Jesus movement were roiled with questions of Gentile participation in a Jewish community following a Jewish Messiah.

These divergent views of inclusion/exclusion are found in the New Testament voices as well. The early decades of the Jesus movement were roiled with questions of Gentile participation in a Jewish community following a Jewish Messiah. Should Gentiles become Jews first in order to be full members of the Jesus community? Could non-kosher and kosher believers participate at the same table of the Lord's Supper, and share the same food? Paul's Letter to the Galatians offers a glimpse of the heated debate around these questions. The book of Acts glosses over the harsh differences, but still suggests the heated debate over inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles (Acts 15).

The later Paulinist who authored Ephesians celebrates the unity in Christ of Gentiles with Jews, but indicates the previous exclusion of Gentiles: "you (Gentiles) are *no longer* strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones" (Eph. 2:19).[4]

Welcoming/Refusing the Stranger

In the New Testament Gospels Jesus is shown sometimes to reflect an initial resistance to Gentiles. For example, in response to the Syrophoenician woman who seeks healing for her daughter, Jesus refuses with the harsh statement: "it is not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). Here the "food" of the kingdom/rule of God is meant for the "children of Israel" (Jesus' fellow Jews), not for the Gentile "dogs." (Cf. Matt. 15:24, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"). Jesus in Mark's Gospel is often a very human Jesus, and is presented here as reflecting his people's common prejudice against the pagan "others." However, Jesus relents when the woman turns his saying around and he acknowledges her quick "logos" (*word, reasoning, logic*) in response (Mk. 7:28-29). This is the only episode in the Gospels where Jesus is bested in a verbal exchange, and he loses to a person triply foreign to him (in gender, language, and ethnicity). Immediately following this exchange, Jesus is depicted as healing another Gentile (a deaf man, Mk. 7:31-37), and then going on to provide food for four thousand Gentiles (8:1-9), paralleling his earlier ministry with his fellow Jews. The Syrophoenician woman initiates a continued journey of Jesus through Gentile territory, extending his kingdom ministry to non-Jews.

Jesus as an itinerant stranger is shown in the Gospels to be sometimes welcomed, at other times refused by the local peoples. This pattern is to be replicated by his itinerant followers in ministry (Mk. 6:7-11). The flip side of receiving/refusing traveling ministers is also evidenced in other New Testament writings, such as Acts' depiction of Paul's being welcomed in some places and run out of town in others. The Johannine "community of love" is instructed on the one hand to welcome the strangers who come to them (3 Jn: 5-7). On the other hand, they are to turn away some traveling teachers whose beliefs are seen as divergent, and not allow them entry into homes (2 Jn: 10). These texts suggest the complexity of communities' definition of "stranger."

Moving from charity to social justice, from immediate service of need to structural change, is prompted by modern reflection upon such targeted biblical texts.

The saying ascribed to Jesus in Matthew 25:35 is cited often as the key text for Christian treatment of strangers: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." In this scene of final judgment, welcome of the stranger is included in the acts of mercy shown (or refused) to those in need (Matt. 25:31-46). This inclusion of stranger with "the least" echoes previous Jewish scripture, as does the identification of the divine with the lowly. The underlying insistence on compassion and mercy toward the poor as evidence of righteousness before God is basic to the ethics of Torah and of prophets such as Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

Moving from charity to social justice, from immediate service of need to structural change, is prompted by modern reflection upon such targeted biblical texts. Micah 6:8 directs a continued question of what is good and what is required now, how can justice and goodness be embodied humbly and enacted now. Love of neighbor, love of stranger, love of enemy is one scriptural trajectory. Liberation theologies and the church's preferential option for the poor take up this trajectory to contend further that "justice is what love looks like

in public." Creating a new world of justice requires discerning choice and engaged solidarity. In the words of Mercy Amba Oduyoye,

> With a frank turning to face the old world with its tangled web of oppression, we set about unraveling it. Each may pick a different thread.[5] ◆

Endnotes

[1] John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018): 68.

[2] The bible also assumes the cisgender perspective typical of ancient patriarchy.

[3] While the angels protect Lot and his daughters in this instance in the Genesis story, there are no delivering angels to protect the Levite's concubine in Judg. 19:22ff: she is brutalized and killed. Cf. also the contrast between Isaac who is protected from being his father's sacrifice (Gen. 22:9-12), and Jephthah's daughter who is not (Judg. 11:34-40).

[4] The verse continues: "and members of the household of God." Appropriation of the "household code" by some Christians inscribed the patriarchal ideals of the larger Greco-Roman culture into Christian community. Paul's communities had evidenced women's leadership (e.g. Ro. 16, where women are titled as deacon, apostle, and co-worker; cf. Phil. 4:2 ff.). But some later Paulinist communities (or at least their male leaders) embraced the patriarchal household ideal as their community model: the household-heading male (husband, father, slave owner) had sole authority, with wife, children, and slaves meant to be properly and completely submissive. See Eph. 5:23-6:9, Col. 3:18-4:1, 1 Tim. 2:8-15, 3:15.

[5] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995): 207.

Living into Nonviolence: A Mercy Imperative

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

Twice in my life I have experienced a tangible sense of the Spirit's presence moving in a Chapter body. The first in 1991 was when, out of great diversity of opinion and viewpoints, the Spirit moved through our First Institute Chapter bringing it to oneness in embracing our Mercy Constitutions. The second in 2017 was similar. Out of many perspectives, a struggle for clarity and diversity born of experiences, the Holy Spirit once again moved through the Chapter bringing it to embrace the lens of nonviolence as the unifying dynamic for addressing our Critical Concerns. For me, it was a "Yes" moment. "Yes," this is what is common to all our concerns. "Yes," reading the signs of the times, violence permeates our society destroying persons and communities, sowing fear and distrust. "Yes," every person must play a part in birthing a culture of peace. "Yes," in faithfulness I must strive to live the call of God embodied in the Chapter documents of 2005 which calls us—"to deepen and assimilate more consciously the practice of non-violence as an integral aspect of the charism of mercy."[1]

The societal violence does not stop with killing. It exists and thrives in the language of hate, in the words that spew intolerance and fear of one's brothers and sisters.

Never has the call to nonviolence been more urgent. Every night the images and horror of violence pours over us as we watch the evening news. The police-shooting deaths of African-Americans George Floyd, Jr. and Breonna Taylor sear the truth of violence into our minds and hearts. The societal violence does not stop with killing. It exists and thrives in the language of hate, in the words that spew intolerance and fear of one's brothers and sisters. It is a moment when each of us must own our complicity in contributing to this untamed toxin of our culture. That was the call given to us in our Institute commitment to nonviolence.

As I reflect upon the Sixth Institute Chapter's call to renew our commitment to view our critical concerns through the lens of nonviolence, the story of the healing of the blind man comes to mind. The Gospel story, so well-known to us, tells of a man seeking sight, wanting to be healed and restored to a relationship with his sighted community (Mk. 8: 22-26). People bring the blind man to Jesus and ask for his healing. At first the blind man's sight is only partially restored. His sight is cloudy. When Jesus touches his eyes a second time, his sight becomes clear and he sees things as they really are. For me, this Gospel story is a paradigm for understanding our call to nonviolence.

Understanding Non-Violence: Alternative to Revenge

I want to reflect on three stages of evolution in our understanding of non-violence. For both the church and for individuals, the idea of non-violence has evolved over time and continues to do so. It moves through various phases or degrees of consciousness. Phase one is as old as time. It echoes in such scripture texts as Psalm 137 which expresses the desire for revenge and retribution in the heart of its writer: "Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks" (Ps. 137:8-9). Anguished by exile and alienation, the psalmist can only wish harm upon his captors. Blinded by pain, hurt and oppression, violence seems like the

only adequate response.

Violence has many faces in the Hebrew scriptures. It makes itself known in the exodus story when the angel of the Lord slays the firstborn of the Egyptians to gain freedom for the Israelites. In the book of Deuteronomy, God orders the complete destruction of the inhabitants of the land the Israelites were entering, the destruction of seven nations. They were to show no mercy (Deut. 7:1-2). All is destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. These scripture episodes, so distressing to us today, project onto God the human desire for vengeance. The violence done by the chosen people was thought to be justified because they were acting for God.

If you only read these passages and others like them, the image of God that emerges is a violent, demanding God. But other texts reflect a different divine response to human infidelity. The Hebrew scriptures also show the face of God who does not desire to punish and destroy but rather wants to challenge people to fidelity, union, and conversion of heart.

The Hebrew scriptures also show the face of God who does not desire to punish and destroy but rather wants to challenge people to fidelity, union, and conversion of heart.

This face of God is found in the Book of Jonah. Jonah is sent to warn the Ninevites that destruction will come if they do not change their hearts. The way they have chosen is a way of death. They listen to Jonah's message and turn to God. God, in mercy, forgives them, much to the distress of Jonah. The book ends with God's attempt to talk Jonah out of his anger, making a gentle, humorous appeal: "And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jon. 4:11)

In the prophetic texts of Isaiah, we see a God who longs for us, who calls us by name. Ultimately, the Suffering Servant will lay down his life for God's people. And Micah tells us that God desires only one thing "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). The image of God as one who utterly destroys those who have been unfaithful, sinful, abusive of the poor or idolatrous gives way to a God who is not arbitrary but forgiving, a God who chastises a little to bring about renewed life, like one who prunes a tree to foster new growth. We see a deepening understanding that it is God's to determine what the fate of our enemies is to be. It is not in human hands.

What is an Appropriate Response to Harm, Damage and Violence?

The second phase of consciousness is one in which violence is limited, confined to specific enemies and care is given to protect the innocent. It might be summed up in the saying: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." The force of our response, the amount of harm inflicted upon the enemy must be proportionate to the harm done. Violence is not seen as evil in itself, only its indiscriminate or disproportionate use.

In this second phase, there is a struggle on both a communal and individual level. This stage of understanding causes us to ask: "What is the appropriate response to hurt, oppression and violence?" Questions arise from our efforts to reconcile the Gospel call to nonviolence with our human desire to enact vengeance or to punish those who harm others. Christians are faced with the Gospel mandate: "Forgive seven times seventy" (Matt. 18:22) or "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not

withhold even your tunic" (Lk. 6: 27-29). In the light of these mandates, they cannot reconcile the use of violence with a carrying out of the words of Jesus.

The emerging consciousness did not come instantly. History shows us an up and down pattern of understanding that more violence is not a Christian response to violence that people suffer. During the Middle Ages, the Church took steps to curb widespread military actions through two measures. The Truce of God limited warfare during periods of church festivals and Lent. The Peace of God protected noncombatants from violence during periods of warfare. But in contraction to these provisions, the violence of the Crusades was supported by ecclesial powers, justifying this warfare on the grounds of "freeing" the Holy Land from the infidels.

Even at this time there were those who saw another way of achieving freedom. St. Francis of Assisi traveled to the Holy Land to meet with Sultan of Egypt Malek al-Kamil. Francis risked his life in his attempt to bring peace. The encounter changed the Sultan. Prisoners of war were more humanely treated in the wake of the meeting. After Francis' departure the Sultan sought peace with the crusaders but was rebuffed. "St. Francis's encounter with Sultan al-Kamil in 1219 can be an antidote, a reminder that responding to violence through violence cannot succeed, that goodness and respect can really change hearts."[2]

Though Francis' efforts were not successful in opening the Holy Land to Christian pilgrims, his intentions were shaped by New Testament understandings. For Francis, to walk in the way of Jesus meant to embrace the whole of humanity, the whole of creation as brother and sister. All were joined together and meant to care for one another. Unfortunately, not all Christians shared that vision at the time.

For Francis, to walk in the way of Jesus meant to embrace the whole of humanity, the whole of creation as brother and sister.

Nowhere is this seen more vividly than in another painful episode in the church's story during post-Reformation times. The chaos of Reformation times planted seeds of fear in the hearts of Church leaders, and gripped by fear of heresy, Inquisitors used violence to deny freedom of conscience, silence dissent and suppress divergent thinking. Dissent became the enemy and was treated with the same fierce vengeance as any enemy on the battlefield. Torture and imprisonment were justified in the name of faith. George Vanderhaar notes: "When I unilaterally assert the truth I'm convinced I possess, I'm on the road to aggression as I strive to convince others that my way is right, with the consequent loss of whatever truth they may possess."[3] The certainty of their position and belief led Inquisitors and political leaders to force conversion on non-Christians, impose their doctrinal ideas upon others through any means, while resorting to torture, expulsion and execution of dissenters. The principle that "the ends justify the means" held sway in practice.

Another example of this second level of consciousness relating to nonviolence is the discussion around what constitutes a "just war." In the midst of horrors like the Nazi genocide during the 1940's, what response is justified? There are no easy answers, for all are called to act in defense of human dignity. Evil must be challenged, but how is that challenge to be carried out?

The use of the atomic bomb to end World War II created a new landscape. Not only did it rain devastating destruction upon the Japanese military, it made no distinction between the innocent and the guilty. While consciousness of

the Gospel call to nonviolence had been growing since the turn of the century, this horrific use of violence brought such reflection to center stage. There emerged growing sensitivity to the destructive nature of violence as well as recognition that it is contrary to the model of Jesus. The search for a path to Gospel fidelity and an effective response to violence led persons to reflect upon and embrace a third level of consciousness, that of nonviolence.

Third Phase: Consciousness of the Interconnectedness of Human Beings

This third phase of nonviolence consciousness is rooted in the understanding that "violence begets violence." It embraces the way of nonviolence as a powerful response, rooted in a Gospel stance. In his message for the 50th World Day of Peace, Pope Francis said:

> Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. Eph. 2: 14-16). Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation. In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: 'As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts.'[4]

In the words of St. Francis of Assisi: As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts.

Christian and non-Christian witnesses called on humankind to adopt a way of relating that honors the interconnections binding the human community together as one. Prophetic voices like that of Thomas Merton pointed to a moral path that rejects violence.

> For Merton, the moral imperative of our time is to sow seeds of nonviolence in our world. It is to treat each person with reverence. It is not to allow anger, hatred, or resentment to linger in one's heart. It is to embrace love as the power that refuses to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence. Finally, it is to envisage a world freed of racism, war, and nuclearism wherein sisters and brothers across the globe are able to join hands in abiding peace![5]

This third phase of consciousness not only identifies nonviolence as the way of Jesus and roots it in a theological understanding of the oneness and interconnectedness of all reality in God, it calls us to identify and address the root causes of violence.[6] This phase of nonviolence stance sees the connections between physical violence and its underlying causes: poverty, oppressive policies, lack of resources needed for sustenance, and fear.

We look not just at the obvious acts of violence around us, but at what the American bishops in the Pastoral Message, *Confronting a Culture of Violence* called "slow motion violence."[7] This slow-motion violence includes discrimination and poverty, hunger and hopelessness, addiction and self-destructive behavior. To that list can be added racism, violence against women and children, homophobia, ethnic hatred, xenophobia, and all the other stances which dehumanize persons. It is here that we find convergence among all the critical concerns of our Institute. Each disempowerment of women, each degradation of earth, each action prompted by racism, each exclusion of the stranger, each policy that denies another the dignity that is his/hers as a child of God, is an act of violence.

John Dear S.J., a long- time advocate for nonviolence, amplifies this understanding by defining violence in this way:

> Violence is best defined as that act of forgetting or ignoring who we are: brothers and sisters of one another, each one of us a child of God.

> Violence occurs in those moments when we forget and deny our basic identity as God's children, when we treat one another as if we were worthless instead of priceless and cling to our own selfish desires, possessions and security.... Violence is any behavior that dehumanizes us, from thoughts of self-hatred to intentional harm or physical injury done to another. Our apathy and indifference in the face of relievable suffering and our willingness to defend our possessions and self-interests have harmful effects on others and are a participation in violence.[8]

In the same vein, the American bishops point out that violence is not limited to what is deadly. "It begins with anger, intolerance, impatience, unfair judgements and aggression. It is often reflected in our language, our entertainment, our driving, our competitive behavior, and the way we treat our environment."[9] In other words, to become persons of nonviolence demands a total inner conversion impacting every aspect of our life.

Every decision I make, every action taken, or prayer offered changes the whole, impacts the soul of the universe.

The starting point for those embracing the way of nonviolence according to Nancy Schreck, O.S.F., "is Jesus' vision of and commitment to the inclusive love of God that welcomes all to the one table and creates a world view that critiques any kind of exclusion."[10] Such a stance of welcome grows out of a contemplative awareness that all creation, human, animal or inanimate, is connected. Every decision I make, every action taken, or prayer offered changes the whole, impacts the soul of the universe.

So how do I/we move to such a stance? How do we become peace? Merton again points to the way:

> According to Merton, nonviolence flows out of the experience of contemplation. The contemplative person awakens to the reality that God is at the center of all that exists….In essence, contemplative awareness leads to the realization that one is called to practice nonviolent love for all one's fellow human beings and all the rest of creation with whom one is united in and through God.[11]

It is this same contemplative awareness that moved Catherine McAuley to live such a life within the context of nineteenth-century Dublin. She lived in the midst of oppression, religious hostility, vast injustice and abject poverty yet she laid out a path for mercy and inclusion. It is part of her legacy to the Mercy community. When attacked she did not lash out in anger, but spoke the truth with integrity. She built strong bonds of relationship among her sisters and challenged them to see in Jesus the pattern of mercy. Whether a domestic worker or wealthy patron, Catholic or Protestant, ruffian or saint, no one was ever excluded from her care. The example of her life clearly shows the link between mercy and nonviolence.

Janet Ruffing speaks of a "collective leap of spiritual consciousness" that leads us to identify and claim the practice of nonviolence as integral to being mercy in our world.[12] When this reality is grasped, we realize that our life has to be of one piece. When we respond to another in violence, we become violence. Ruffing points out:

> Word and manner are important. What we say and how we act either fosters a genuine and peaceable love or expresses the violence erupting from our self-centered thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. Words and behavior either promote division, rivalry, and violence or foster union and charity, and embody this vision of the interconnectedness of all reality with itself and with God.[13]

The 2017 Institute Chapter's call for each Sister of Mercy to embrace the way of nonviolence has a two-fold mandate. First, as

individuals, we are called to embrace wholeheartedly and consistently the stance of nonviolence. Second, it asks of us individually and collectively, to place our energies, resources and voices at the service of peace. That means eliminating as best we can, the underlying causes of violence, the injustices and disparities of society. Inner transformation and active peacemaking are both great challenges to undertake and we cannot undertake them alone. We need each other, and we need our collaborators in the same work. We need to call each other to remembrance when our language is not respectful, when we support or participate in entertainment that glorifies violence, when we vote. We need to ask ourselves who is welcome at our table? Whose ideas find a listening ear? How do I bring my "enemy" to prayer?

In writing these words, I realize that I am very much like the blind man seeking sight. Each day the Lord touches me, I gain more clarity, yet I realize that I stand convicted of not always having my words match my actions. That is probably the most awesome aspect of our call to nonviolence. We are always beginners on the path. We are never there. When threatened, we might very well retreat to an earlier stance and wrestle with loving our enemy. Rooting nonviolence in our lives is a day to day, moment to moment discipline. It asks from us a mindfulness, attention and an inclusive love. Failure to take up this challenge is a failure to be mercy for the world. ◆

Endnotes

[1] Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Fourth Institute Chapter Statement, 2005.
[2] Navid Zaldi, "St Francis of Assisi and Sultan akl-Kimil: A Bold Christian-Muslim Encounter," *Sufi Ways*, Blog (May 2, 2016).
[3] Gerard Vanderhaar. *Beyond Violence* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998):14.
[4] Pope Francis, *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, Message of Pope Francis for the 50th World Day of Peace (January 1, 2017): §2.
[5] Marilyn Sunderman, R.S.M., Thomas Merton on the Ethic of Nonviolence," *The MAST Journal*, Vol. 17:1 (2007): 48.
[6] Janet Ruffing, R.S.M., Catherine McAuley and Nonviolence" *The MAST Journal*, Vol. 17:1 (2007):34.
[7] USCCB, *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action* (1994): §2.
[8] John Dear, S.J.,"Forgetting Who We Are", in *From Violence to Wholeness* (Las Vegas, NV: Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service, 2002): 31.
[9] USCCB, Confronting a Culture of Violence, §2.
[10] Nancy Schreck, O.S.F., "The Faithful Nonviolence of Jesus", in *From Violence to Wholeness* (Las Vegas, NV: Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service, 2002):54.
[11] Sunderman, "Thomas Merton on the Ethic of Nonviolence", op. cit., p. 42.
[12] Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley and Nonviolence," op. cit., p. 33.
[13] Ruffing, Ibid., p. 36.

The Taste of Racism in Scripture

Jean Evans, R.S.M.

There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo[1] into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke, and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa.[2]

I can still hear, as a junior in high school, our English teacher, Sister Jacqueline Crouch, R.S.M., reading us the first few lines of Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country.* She read those few sentences over and over, so taken was she by the lyricism of the text. Then she introduced us to the characters and to the reality of racial segregation (pronounced "apar-thate") in South Africa.

In the novel Paton sets the scene for the tragic story of a young man who leaves a rural valley in Zululand to find a job in the bustling city of Johannesburg, roughly two hundred miles north west on the Highvelt.[3] Paton, an English-speaking South African, directed Diepkloof Reformatory for young offenders from 1935-1949. He knew from experience that young men coming from rural areas would sooner or later find themselves in trouble with the law. It wasn't until 1948, when the predominantly Afrikaans Reformed Nationalist Party came into power, that the policy of apartheid was codified and enforced. Apartheid laws governed every sphere of domestic and civil life—housing, transportation, health care, education, and religious practice. All South Africans working in cities and towns, that is, domestic workers and live-in help, needed identity books "passbooks," without which one could be fined and/or arrested. As resistance against repressive policies and police violence grew, the Government enacted a State of Emergency in 1985. After a prolonged period of violent attacks by members of the African National Congress 1988-1990, and the successful boycott of South African goods overseas, the country's economy had sharply declined and degraded on the world market.

South African President F.W. de Klerk had unbanned the African National Congress and would release Nelson Mandela from prison that day.

My Experience of Racism in South Africa

February 2, 1990 was a day I'll never forget.[4] There were five of us Mercies teaching at St. Matthew's Secondary School in Soweto at the time. The 600-plus student body were standing in the school yard for Morning Assembly when one of the teachers stood in front of the kids with this news: South African President F.W. de Klerk had unbanned the African National Congress and would release Nelson Mandela from prison that day. The kids cheered and then flew out the school gates, running several blocks up the township roads to neighboring schools in the area. They returned in about twenty minutes—breathless and overjoyed. What a victory lap it was!

In the next three years, with good will and support from fervent prayers for peace throughout the country, leaders of ninety-two organizations began meetings for a negotiated settlement. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) led to the formation of a Government of National Unity and ultimately to South Africa's first democratic election on April 27, 1994. Lines

of first-time voters snaked around schools serving as polling stations. One old woman arrived at our center in rural Winterveldt rolled in on a wheelbarrow, delighted to vote for the first time in her life.

On May 10, 1994, world leaders descended upon Pretoria for the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first president of South Africa's non-racist, non-sexist democracy. The whole world, it seemed, was cheering. However, even in the joy of new freedom, there remained questions, sadness and anger at the government's systematic oppression of 87% of the population during the Apartheid years. Many residents had been victimized, kidnapped, maimed, or imprisoned without access to representation or fair trial. Some had been killed. The Government of National Unity made provision for a commission to investigate the atrocities of the apartheid government: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was created to facilitate public acknowledgement of human rights abuses from 1948-1994.

However, even in the joy of new freedom, there remained questions, sadness and anger at the government's systematic oppression of 87% of the population during the Apartheid years.

During Commission sessions, victims of gross human rights violations or bereaved family members gave statements about their experiences. Perpetrators of violence also gave statements to the Commission and requested amnesty from civil and criminal prosecution, which was granted in some cases. The work of the TRC continued from 1995 – 1998 with Archbishop Desmond Tutu Emeritus as its Chair. He wrote:

> A Dutch visitor to the Commission observed that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission must fail. Its task is simply too demanding. Yet, she argued, "even as it fails, it has already succeeded beyond any rational expectations." She quoted Emily Dickinson: "…the truth must dazzle gradually…or all the world would be blind." However, the Commission has not been prepared to allow the present generation of South Africans to grow gently into the harsh realities of the past and, indeed, many of us have wept as we were confronted with its ugly truths. However painful the experience has been, we remain convinced that there can be no healing without truth. My appeal to South Africans as they read this report is not to use it to attack others, but to add to it, correct it and ultimately to share in the process that will lead to national unity through truth and reconciliation.[5]

Two years later, the Dutch Reformed Church apologized for the sin of apartheid.[6] BBC reported that on the final day of the hearings, the DRC issued an apology for its role in support of the apartheid, the system of racial segregation in South Africa that existed for nearly fifty years.

Turning to the Scriptural Record

In this article we sample the taste of racism in scripture. We observe inclusion and exclusion in Israel, vis-à-vis treatment of resident aliens and foreigners. In the prophets Amos and Jonah we see God's preferential option for the poor and the universalism of God's love.[7] The writings of Ezra and Nehemiah record the return of exiles from Babylon and steps taken to ensure total adherence to the precepts of the Law. Finally, in Jesus we see the "wideness of God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea." God's mercy is so far removed from people's, as the heavens are high above the earth (Ps. 103:11).

Aliens and Strangers in Israel

From earliest times, the movement of peoples has been part of the human experience and this is true of Abraham and Sarah's descendants.[8] Their lives were shaped by the search for the security of

a homeland. Clifford says that "ancient Eastern kings emphasized their sponsorship of a legal system whose rights would be easy to slight."[9] The following divine injunction is set out in Leviticus 19:34: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." The same laws applied to sojourners and Israelites, as well as rules governing Sabbath rest. Surprisingly, non-Israelite men were accepted to open the Passover celebration, provided they were circumcised (Ex. 12:43-49).

This was not the case for foreigners (*nokri*). Resident aliens, those "committed to living in Israel" enjoyed privileges not granted to foreigners. Their animals could be used in sacrifice; resident aliens paid no interest on loans; and their debts would be forgiven during sabbatical years.[10] While resident aliens were protected strangers, who lived permanently in their adopted communities, guests were expected to be loyal to their protectors (Gen. 21:23) and to be bound by their laws.[11]

"The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

Foreigners maintained ties to their original home and sought to maintain their former political status. Frequently, they would enter the land to engage in trade or other commercial activities. Law codes favored resident aliens (*ger*),[12] although foreigners were protected by folk traditions on the treatment of strangers: "No stranger ever had to sleep outside, my door was always open to the traveler," said Job (31:32). Foreigners were generally unwelcome because non-Jewish women customarily brought idols and idolatrous ritual practices to Israelite spouses and communities. Solomon's unfortunate penchant for multitudes of foreign women spelled the end of his kingship and Israel's practice of monotheism (cf. I Kings 11:1-12).

Throughout the Pentateuch there are repetitions of the injunction found in Exodus 22:21: "You must not exploit or oppress a foreign resident, for you yourselves were foreigners in the land of Egypt" This is repeated in Exodus 23:9: "You yourselves were foreigners," as duties toward enemies are outlined. "You will not oppress the alien; you know how an alien feels, for you yourselves were once aliens in Egypt." Again, in Leviticus: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:34). In accord with the spiritual principle of repetition, the phrase, "You yourselves were once foreigners," from Exodus 23:9 is a reminder worth noting."[13]

Messages from the Prophets

One of the least likely prophets was the shepherd from Tekoa, ten miles south of Jerusalem. He pleads the cause of social justice and charity to the poor, while criticizing the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom under the reign of King Jeroboam (786 B.C. – 746 B.C.):

> The Lord God says this: For the three crimes, the four crimes of Israel, I have made my decree and will not relent: because they have sold the upright for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals, because they have crushed the heads of the weak into the dust and thrust the rights of the oppressed to one side, father and son sleeping with the same girl and thus profaning my holy altar (Amos 2:6-7).

Amos tells the Israelites that they have been guilty of the same sins as their Gentile neighbors—violations of human rights, rigged

courts, and cult prostitution which had become a part of their rituals in imitation of their Canaanite neighbors.[14] Amos rants against unfaithful Samaritans, "Listen to this saying, you cows of Bashan living on the hill of Samaria, exploiting the weak and ill-treating the poor, saying to your husbands, 'Bring us something to drink!'"(4:1). He calls for conversion to the Lord, for moral rectitude: "Seek good and not evil so that you may live and the Lord God of Sabaoth be with you as you claim he is. Hate evil, love good, let justice reign at the city gate: it may be that the Lord God of Sabaoth, may take pity on the remnant of Jacob"(5:14).

The story of Jonah is a book *about* a prophet, not written by the prophet.[15] The theme of the book is God's incredible mercy. Jonah is called to preach conversion to the Ninevites, whose history as fierce Assyrian warriors who subdued the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.) frightened Jonah. He resists the preaching mission, boards a ship sailing in the opposite direction and ends up in the sea, only to be spewed out of big fish's mouth. Jonah then complies with God's directive. After the preaching of Jonah, the people of Nineveh believed in God's commands and proclaimed a fast. They are spared and Jonah is angry, grieved, upset. Yet, he learns that "God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, patient, overflowing in love, mercy, steadfastness, fidelity." In this theological perspective, God's gracious mercy is seen as fundamental, as the basic expression of divine identity and as motivating the divine activity of creation, redemption, and ongoing covenant relationship.[16]

Much later, after the exiles' return from Babylon, fear and prejudice against foreigners appeared in the exhortations of Ezra and Nehemiah. Lest they lapse into idolatry, Israelite men were required by the prophets to divorce their foreign wives before returning to Jerusalem. "In all likelihood the Book of Ruth reacts to the 5th century reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah."[17]

In their efforts to avoid "spiritual contamination" from the foreigners, leaders forbade intermarriage. Judah became a closed community. Their liturgies were restored, and their practices complied with ritual requirements. The prophets are aware that neighboring communities are trying to thwart the re-settlement process, but are happy that returnees' lives are now centered on the Temple and the Law. Ezra is eager to rid the country of the "pollution" of the foreigners. After public meetings, a list is posted naming Jewish men who had sinned by taking foreign wives and bearing children. At the end of the list, scripture says, "All these had married foreign wives, and they sent them away with their children" (Ezra 10:44).

Despite everything, the prophets did not foresee a return to the past; rather, they dreamed of a new covenant. They hoped for a new spirit and new justice for the future.

The Preparation for the Messiah

Scripture does tell stories of extraordinary characters—foreigners whose self-sacrifice and loyalty confounds the expectations of Jews. Ruth, the outsider, the loyal Moabite woman is memorialized in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17). The story of Ruth becomes a way to "check the reform's ghetto tendency."[18] That David himself had a Moabite ancestor suggests that intermarriage may not have been such a disaster after all. Witness Ruth: Even if she is an author's creation and a foreigner, she is a most loyal and steadfast companion to Naomi, and becomes the great-grandmother of David.

"Through centuries of foreign domination, the Jews entreated God to keep the Promise of the Covenant and send a liberator," writes Njure. "God spoke to them through the prophets who denounced them for injustice and infidelity."[19] Despite everything, the prophets did not foresee a

return to the past; rather, they dreamed of a new covenant. They hoped for a new spirit and new justice for the future.[20] "In those days," Jeremiah says, "Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (Jer. 33:16).

"You Shall be My Witness…to the Ends of the Earth"

The story of Jesus' interaction with the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:24-30 is more than an example of Jesus' healing ministry. "It signals Jesus' turning from the Jewish toward the gentile world," writes Harrington.[21] The scripture says that Jesus travelled to the region of Tyre in Sidon. "And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid" (Mk. 7:24). A Greek woman, born in Syro-Phoenicia, tracks him down and explains what she needs from him—a cure for her daughter who is possessed by evil spirits. She encounters reluctance on Jesus' part. Kinukawa's analysis of the story shows the entry of Jesus into a no-go zone of ritual purity as far as Jews were concerned-- the territory of Tyre and Sidon. That Jesus' accedes to the request of non-Jew and a pagan for her daughter's healing despite their ritual impurity addresses challenges that Mark's newly formed community faced as they admitted Gentiles to the fold.[22] "The indications are that 7:24 – 8:26 was planned to meet the needs of Gentile-Christian readers—Mark wanted to show that the concern of Jesus was not limited to Jews but reached non-Jewish peoples, beyond the confines of Galilee."[23] Jesus' crossing the border stated clearly to the demanding woman, that he is willing to be "defiled" so that those on the margins might be welcomed. Pope Francis writes, "The Gospel of the marginalized is where our credibility is."[24]

Perhaps it is in the story of the Good Samaritan "that Jesus' authority is invoked to resolve a difficult question in the gospel mission—how does one gain eternal life?"[25] The lawyer is tested by Jesus and is taken to the next level—who is your neighbor? In the course of the parable the third person who passes the robbery victim offers assistance, even though Samaritans were not allowed to touch Jews.[26] "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers? Jesus asked the lawyer. He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37) This is the message of God's universal love.

Conclusion

"What amazes me again and again is the *inclusiveness* of Jesus' mission," writes Bosch.[27] "It embraces both the poor and the rich, both the oppressed and the oppressor, both the sinners and the devout. His mission is one of dissolving alienation and breaking down walls of hostility, of crossing boundaries between individuals and groups." ◆

Endnotes

[1] Pronounced "Ee-kó-po" with the x sounding like a k.
[2] Alan Paton. *Cry, the Beloved Country*. (New York: Scribner's, 1948): 1.
[3] Johannesburg is situated on a plateau at an altitude of 5,751 feet.
[4] Nelson Mandela was tried for treason in 1964 and given a life sentence. For most of his twenty-seven years in prison, he was held on Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town.
[5] https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf, 1998, Vol. I, p. 4. Accessed July 14, 2020.
[6] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/despatches/africa/33032.stm. Nov. 19, 1997. Accessed July 18, 2020.
[7] Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. *Prophets and the Word of God*, (Fides Publishers, Inc.: Notre Dame, Indiana, 1964): 230.
[8] M. Daniel and R. Carroll., *"Immigration and the Bible"* in *Missio Dei*, No. 19, (Mennonite Mission Network, 2010): 20.

[9] Richard J. Clifford *(Deuteronomy: with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989): 67.
[10] Douglas Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible. What Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us* (New York: Harper One/HarperCollins, 2012): 288-289.
[11] W. R. Smith and M. Guttmann, *Strangers and Gentiles* (The Gale Group: Encyclopedia Judaica, 2008) www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/strangers-and-gentiles. Accessed July 18, 2020.
[12]"In contrast with the foreigner, the ger (גֵּר), the resident alien, lived more or less permanently in his adopted community. Like the Arabic jār, he was "the protected stranger," who was totally dependent on his patrons for his well-being," https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/strangers-and-gentiles#:~:text=In%20contrast%20with%20the%20foreigner%2C%20the%20ger%20%28%D7%92%D6%BC%D6%B5%D7%A8%29%2C,totally%20dependent%20on%20his%20patrons%20for%20his%20well-being. Accessed July 22, 2020.
[13] "For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"(I Cor. 4:7).
[14] Bruce Vawter, C.M. *Amos, Hosea, Micah, with an Introduction to Classical Prophecy* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981): 34-35.
[15] Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. *The Books of Aggai, Zacharia, Malachi, Jonah, Joel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1961) .
[16] Mary Criscione, R.S.M., Presentation *A Retreat on the Book of Jonah*, (Burlingame, CA: Mercy Center, August 3-5, 2017).
[17] Geoffrey F. Wood, "Ruth, Lamentations," *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968): 603–606.
[18] Ibid., p. 604.
[19] Stephen F. Njure, *A History of the Catholic Church* (Africa: Paulines Publications, 2004): 15.
[20] Albert Nolan, O.P., *Hope in an Age of Despair and Other Talks and Writings*, ed. by Stan Muyebe (New York: Orbis Books, 2009): 136.
[21] Wilfrid Harrington, O.P., *Mark* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979): 103-105.
[22] Hisako Kinukawa, "The Syrophoenician Woman: Mark 7.24-30" in *Voices from the Margin Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. by R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Orbis Books, 2002): 138-155.
[23] Ibid., 1979, p. 103.
[24]https://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/pope-francis-gospel-marginalized-where-our-credibility-found-and-revealed.
[25] Eugene LaVerdiere, S.S.S., *Luke* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980): 151.
[26] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis: 1991): 22.

What Can We Learn from Women Saviors Memorialized in Scripture?

Judith Schubert, R.S.M.

While we head toward new community realities amidst the effects of the pandemic, let us take note of one of our deepest Critical Concerns, namely, that of women. As one of the five direction statements for our ministerial focus, "Women" offers the following description: "We believe that women's education, health and spirituality need special attention. We continue this mission in our schools, colleges, health-care institutions and spirituality centers. We advocate for equal pay, for services for domestic violence victims, and for the rights of girls and women in especially repressive societies."[1]

A deep concern for women stems from our loving founder, Catherine McAuley. Throughout her life Catherine demonstrated a special involvement with the disadvantaged, particularly women and girls. Unlike other Catholics at the time, her life with the Callahans offered Catherine a unique opportunity to read and study the Bible. What biblical stories could she have pondered that gave her such a profound concern for the predicament of women? What women savior figures in the Bible inspired her to act on their behalf? Stories about valiant women occur in all sorts of biblical literature: myths, legends, patriarchal narratives, sayings historical fiction, healing stories, dramatic offers a sampling of named and unnamed women from these sacred texts that possibly inspired Catherine in her profound commitment to help alleviate the plight of Irish women of her time.

As a preface to specific texts about women, it becomes necessary to recognize what the biblical authors say about God's view of women. At the outset of the story of creation, the Lord proclaims: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. . .So God created humankind in the Divine image, in the image of God . . . male and female God created them" (Gen. 1:26-27). Clearly, this statement intends equality between women and men. Remember that this programmatic pronouncement has been composed and preserved in the very first chapter of the entire bible! Thus, as we reflect on passages about women, let us never forget both women and men have been created as equals in the eyes of God. Neither has been created "better" or to rule over the other.

Thus, as we reflect on passages about women, let us never forget both women and men have been created as equals in the eyes of God.

Despite the view of Genesis writers that God intended women and men to be distinct but equal as persons, subsequent stories about women in the bible do not always reflect this intention. Thus, as we reflect on passages about women, let us never forget both women and men have been created as equals in the eyes of God.

On the contrary, we encounter numerous examples of women who have been abused, neglected and defamed in various ways. Their grave mistreatment offends modern sensibilities and clearly ignites our determination that girls and women need to be defended.

While these biblical narratives remain important, other accounts of women under duress, who rescue others from disastrous situations, also motivate us to defend others. In this article I focus on examples of biblical women who acted as savior figures through their courage, leadership and invention. Such characters demonstrate that, especially in dire circumstances, their strength and

creative leadership serve as examples for us. Their stories inspire us and offer resources to promote the well-being of girls and women today.

When we open the pages of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, we encounter numerous characters who represent women saviors for others. This article will address two examples from the Hebrew Bible and two instances from the New Testament of women leaders, who in some way acted as saviors, despite their mistreatment by others.

Sarah, the Wife of Abraham (Gen. 12:10-20)

One of the less mentioned narratives about Sarah and her husband, Abraham, appears in Gen. 12:10-20. Before entering Egypt as unprotected aliens, Abraham schemes to deflect the Egyptians by deceit regarding his true relationship to his beautiful wife. He instructs Sarah to lie and "say you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you." One purpose is to represent Abraham as her guardian, not her husband, so he won't be killed if someone wants to lay claim to Sarah by "eliminating" Abraham. Despite the consequences of this self-serving command, the first matriarch of the bible acquiesces. As a result Sarah became enslaved in "Pharaoh's house."[2] Here Abraham's life has been spared because of his protective wife. He doesn't represent a threat to the romantic interests any other man may have in Sarah because he's her guardian. She is available for marriage—so goes the fiction.

Sarah saved Abraham despite the absence of any concern of his for her protection or welfare.

The story reveals Sarah as a strong woman, who functions as a savior figure for Abraham because by her response to the Egyptians she held the life or death of her husband in her hands. Sarah saved Abraham despite the absence of any concern of his for her protection or welfare. Recall that in ancient times women would have been possessions to be purchased. Therefore, someone like Sarah, who is not only beautiful but "very beautiful" (12:14), would be desired by other men, especially those who had the means to "pay" Abraham for her. Consequently, Pharaoh compensated Abraham highly for her in material possessions. In essence, Abraham "shares a wife to save his life."[3] His decision caused great distress to Sarah in her enslavement to Pharoah.

While Sarah became a savior for Abraham, God became a savior for Sarah. In 12:17-20, plagues descended upon the house of Pharaoh because Sarah was already married. When the Egyptian leader learned the truth, that the couple was married, he released Sarah and sent them both back to their homeland with all their new possessions.

Shiprah, Puah (Exod. 1:15-22); Unnamed Mother, Sister and Egyptian Princess (Exod. 2:1-10)

Tradition has emphasized Moses in the Book of Exodus as the one who freed his people. In the past, male scholars were so anxious to focus on the birth of Moses and his destiny that they bypassed stories of courageous women who appear in Exodus 1 and 2—the mother of Moses, the midwives, his sister, and the Egyptian princess. The saving actions of these women, who protected Moses after he was born, concealing him, disguising his identity, and adopting him, affect the whole history of salvation.

Exodus 1:15-22 describes two heroic women Hebrew midwives named Shiprah ("Beauty") and Puah ("Girl"). Held as slaves by the Egyptians, they had been ordered by Pharaoh to commit infanticide on any newborn Hebrew male. The women refused to obey, subverting the official order. Instead of murdering the newborn males, they protected them. "The valiant actions of these women saviors illustrate the principle that the only way to break oppression is to refuse to be oppressed."[4] These two brave women represent the first persons in the

entire book to oppose the will of Pharaoh. They acted valiantly and thereby thwarted the oppressor. Interestingly, their names live on in these sacred pages while the identity of the Pharaoh remains unnamed.[5]

In Exodus 2:1-10, two women and one girl appear as prominent figures of salvation for the infant, who had been placed in the Nile River. All remain unnamed and have been identified only by titles. However, in later chapters, two of the figures have been identified as Jochebed, the mother of Moses and Miriam, his sister.

Ironically, two enemies, the Egyptian princess and the Hebrew slave woman and her daughter unite to save the infant Moses.

How did the first woman, Jochebed, emerge as an example of invention and rescue? The legend narrates that the courageous mother hid her infant son from being murdered despite Pharaoh's orders. When three months passed, and it became impossible to hide him, she placed him in a basket which floated on the Nile River, in hopes that someone would rescue him. When Pharaoh's daughter discovered the Hebrew baby along the water's edge, the baby's sister came out of hiding, stepped up and offered to find a "wet nurse" to feed him. The Princess said "Yes." Jochebed, his birth mother, concealing her identity, was engaged to nurse the baby. Despite the risk to her own life, she disobeys Pharaoh.

By her royal position and ethnicity, the princess of Egypt would have been an enemy to the Hebrew woman and girl. Yet, when the princess out of compassions said "yes," to save the baby, she became a rescuer, using her power and position to save baby Moses from death. In doing so, she bonded with Jochebed and Miriam in the second chapter of Exodus. Ironically, two enemies, the Egyptian princess and the Hebrew slave woman and her daughter, unite to save the infant Moses. The Pharaoh's edict to kill the newborn Hebrew boys became meaningless as these inventive and compassionate women offered life and freedom to this infant.

The brief narratives in Exodus 1:15-22 and 2:1-10 portray five resilient female figures-- two enslaved Hebrew midwives; a clever, protective mother; a spirited sister and a compassionate princess. Their fortitude, strength and leadership offer a hopeful future for Moses and his vital role in bringing the enslaved Hebrews to freedom. Without these courageous women savior figures, the future of God's people would have been written differently.

In the New Testament, we also discover examples of women, who, despite their inferior positions and mistreatment, continue to act honorably in order to save others. In the Gospel of John two chosen figures represent such roles-- the unnamed Woman of Samaria (John 4) and Mary of Magdala (John 20).

The Unnamed Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42)

In this remarkable story, the longest conversation of any woman with Jesus in the gospels, an unnamed woman of Samaria responds openly to Jesus without any need of seeing his miracles (called "signs" in this Gospel), without any doubts or any fear. She came to believe in Jesus solely after a conversation with him. Then she proceeds to convince the townspeople to believe in him.

Jesus enters into Samaritan territory, where he exchanges conversation with a woman stranger. From the outset the setting displays unusual and even oppositional circumstances. A man appears with a woman near a well at a peculiar hour. The man requests assistance from this unknown woman. The man, a Jew, converses with this woman, a Samaritan. At this time, Jews had no contact with Samaritans. The mutual antagonism

originated when ancestors of the Samaritans resided in this territory, once part of the northern kingdom of a divided monarchy after the death of Solomon, David's son. Residents of this region had been influenced by non-Jewish residents to assimilate other religious practices into their worship. By the time of Jesus, centuries later, Samaritans believed in the Torah but did not accept any prophetic books or biblical prophets, except for the prophet Moses. Yet, like Jews of Galilee and Judea, they did await a Messiah, whom they called the Taheb.

The dialogue between the woman and Jesus begins with a request for a drink. It soon turns into a developed theological conversation because the woman remained completely open to him. As the topics deepen from a simple appeal for water to the proclamation that Jesus offers the woman "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (4:14) and to the comments about her husbands (4:16-18), the woman comes to believe that Jesus, the Jewish man with whom she converses, represents someone very important. Therefore, she proclaims, "Sir, I see that you are a Prophet!" As a Samaritan, the woman now equates Jesus with their only Prophet, the highly venerated Moses. As the dialogue deepens, she announces: "I know that Messiah (Taheb) is coming who is called Christ. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." (4:25). Jesus responds "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

For the first time in the entire fourth Gospel, Jesus shares his divine identity directly, not with his male disciples who accompanied him or with Jews in high religious positions, like Nicodemus in John 3. On the contrary, Jesus shares this deep theological reality with an unnamed woman of Samaria. As a result, she expressed her new-found faith in Jesus by sharing it with the villagers at a costly personal price.

The narrative indicates that the woman "left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, 'Come see a man who told me everything I have done'" (4:28-29). Her invitation "Come, see" echoes Jesus' call to his disciples earlier in the Gospel when he bids them to "Come and see" (1:39). To assure that the townspeople would accept her request, the woman had to add, "A man who told me everything I have ever done!" The clause almost guarantees the movement of the villagers to the well, even out of sheer curiosity. As a result of this humbling remark, they believed her invitation and took the opportunity to seek Jesus as well as to learn more about her life.

John's gospel affirms the woman's significance as a leader when it narrates that "many Samaritans from the city believed in him (Jesus) because of the woman's testimony" (4:39).

Here the woman functions as a savior figure. She sacrifices her dignity to bring others to belief in Jesus. Surely, the woman deserves admiration and respect as she humiliates herself to bring a saving message to her neighbors. She is the first person to bring a message to the Samaritans that Jesus is the Christ. She is the first missionary in John's gospel, even before the male disciples. John's gospel affirms the woman's significance as a leader when it narrates that "many Samaritans from the city believed in him (Jesus) because of the woman's testimony" (4:39).

Mary of Magdala (John 20:1-18)

Mary of Magdala represents one of the most prominent women in the Gospel of John and the entire early Church. Despite her prominence, her identity has been diminished, confused and maligned throughout history. Often, she has been identified with Mary, the sister of Martha (Luke 10), or the woman caught in adultery (John 8), or equated with the unnamed sinner who anointed

Jesus (Luke 7:36-50). She is not the "Mary" of any of these women. More importantly, in the several times that she has appeared in the New Testament, nowhere has Mary of Magdala been described as a prostitute. Despite this distinction, she has been presented as a reformed prostitute throughout Christian history by artists, teachers, clerics and even at least one Pope, Gregory the Great.[6] This mistreatment and centuries of lies that have demeaned Mary Magdalene—and the fact that women scholars have been responsible for rescuing her—motivate Sisters of Mercy to do the same. The direction statement about women opens a path for us to work to redeem the human dignity and worth of women and girls.

Except for Luke 8:1-3, the evangelists do not bring Mary Magdalene into the gospel narrative until Jesus' death and resurrection. In the crucifixion scenes her name appears high on the list of the women who stood by the cross of Jesus, even though, according Matt 25:56 "all the (male) disciples deserted him and fled." Therefore, even in her late arrival into the gospels, Mary of Magdala represents the woman leader in the Jesus movement, inspiring the male disciples.

All four gospel writers report that Mary of Magdala and various other women represent the first witnesses to experience the resurrection. They arrive before the men at the empty tomb; they are the first to hear the angelic message. Mary Magdalene's name always appears first on the list of women, which indicates her prominence. In both the gospel of Matthew and John, the resurrected Jesus himself appears to the women. Though not named as official apostles, the women do the work of initiating and carrying the message the resurrected Jesus sends to his male followers.

These women function as savior figures because they risked everything to follow their hearts.

Appearance to Mary Magdalene

John 20:1-18 is the first appearance made by the risen Jesus in this Gospel. Here Mary represents the key witness to him. Due to her privileged position in relationship to Jesus and his choice of her to proclaim the resurrection to the other disciples, Carla Ricci states that "Mary Magdalene should be seen in equal terms with that of Peter."[7]

On Easter morning Mary goes to the tomb in search of Jesus and discovers that the stone had been rolled back. Immediately, she returns to tell the other disciples. Peter and the beloved disciple return with Mary to confirm what she had said. When they left the tomb to return home, Mary remained and wept. Note that the appearance of both the angels at the tomb and the resurrected Jesus took place only after Peter and the other disciple departed. This point suggests that the author emphasizes the importance of Mary of Magdala as an authority figure in the early Church, distinguished from Peter yet embodying a unique mission along with his.

Throughout this entire narrative, Mary seeks Jesus. Her deep love and faithfulness as a disciple remain completely intact and transparent. As she weeps, she hears the question from the risen Jesus: "For whom are you looking?" For a brief moment, she did not recognize him, but when Jesus called her by name, she knew his voice. She had been searching for the dead Jesus but now finds Life itself in the risen Lord.

Jesus instructed Mary, Go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Of all the disciples, Jesus selected Mary to bring the powerful news of his resurrection and ascension to the others. In the order of events in John's gospel, after Peter left the empty tomb, puzzled, Jesus appears to Mary of Magdala. Thus, this woman becomes the first and only person to whom the risen Jesus entrusts this life-giving message. He chose an historically subordinate

woman to be the first apostle of the resurrection. She announced Jesus' message to the whole community of disciples. Unquestionably, Mary of Magdala brings new life to her fellow disciples with this "good news" about Jesus. Like many other women, who have preceded her in the Bible, Mary acts as a savior figure by offering hope and new life to others through her readiness, openness and courage to tell others the message she has received from Jesus.

What can we learn from these biblical women? One point that emerges unmistakably has been courage—overcoming their fear. Fear can cripple or even kill visionary change. These women function as savior figures because they risked everything to follow their hearts. Let us too, in the tradition of Catherine McAuley, take risks and be courageous in our own mission to "save" other women. ◆

Endnotes

[1] Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns.
[2] The wife-sister motif of Abraham is repeated in Genesis 20:1-7 and later with Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 26.
[3] Carol Meyers, "Named Women," in *Women in Scripture,* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000): 150.
[4] Irene Nowell, *Women of the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997): 48.
[5] Ramses II, the third Egyptian Pharaoh of the 19th dynasty, would have been the ruler at that time.
[6] To read the homily of Pope Gregory, Google "Homily 33 of Gregory the Great."
[7] Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994):129.

The Role of Women in the Early Church: Equal in Dignity

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M.

Women's ecclesial roles within the Church has been a controversial issue for generations. Traditionally, public ecclesial roles have come to be understood as flowing from ordained priests not Baptism.[1] However, Vatican II (1962-5) reaffirmed the belief that it is through Baptism that each Christian is called to service.[2] Since this seems to be foundational in Paul's theology, I will examine a few of the Pauline letters to better understand the role of women in the early Church.

New Testament scholars suggest Paul wrote seven letters, but women are only mentioned by name in 1 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians and Philemon.[3] This article will focus on Galations, 1 Corinthians and Romans because they highlight the various roles women played in the early Church. Prior to examining these texts, a brief summary of Paul's background and theology is useful.

Paul's Background

Paul was a man of his times. He was a Hellenistic Jew, assimilated into Greco-Roman culture. Besides Hebrew and likely Latin, he spoke Greek, the language used in commerce.[4] These attributes proved to be a valuable asset in his ministry. He was born in Tarsus, a commercial city on the south-eastern coast of present day Turkey, of Jewish parents who were Roman citizens.[5] His missionary world would eventually extend from Asia Minor to Britain, from Jerusalem to Rome, and from North Africa to Gaul.[6] The Jewish women referred to in his letters were, like Paul, socialized and educated within a Greco-Roman culture when they became converts to the Jesus Movement by his preaching as a missionary.

Paul does not refer to the public ministry of Jesus in his letters. But we know from the gospels that Jesus healed and taught people living in the land of Israel as well as territories considered non-Jewish or Gentile. Jesus worked side by side with men and women. Luke mentions it was women who provided financial support to Jesus and his disciples as they traveled (Lk 8:1-3).[7] As the gospels indicate, many of the early Christians were women who witnessed to the healing, preaching and miracles of Jesus, and supported the work he and his disciples were doing. Paul's writings reflect a similar geographic outreach, the hosting by women of early house-churches, and inclusion of women in both his theology and instructions to the local churches (Gal 5:6,13; 1 Cor:11: 20-3).

Paul's writings reflect a similar geographic outreach, the hosting of by women of early house-churches, and inclusion of women in both his theology and instructions to the local churches (Gal 5:6,13; 1 Cor:11: 20-3).

Paul's Theology in Galatians

Paul's theology about inclusion of Gentiles in the church is addressed urgently in his letter to the Galatians, located in Asia Minor. The composition of the community included both Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish members argued that to be a genuine Christian one must also be a good Jew.[8] Affirming this position would require adult males to be circumcised, Gentile members to circumcise their male infants, and all Gentile members to follow Jewish dietary laws. In addition, authoritative positions assigned to men in Jewish tradition would hold true for the Galatian churches.

Responding to the crisis, Paul asserted that

the Gospel he preached was superior to these laws and customs (Gal. 3:24-26). Many ethical aspects of the Torah guided the community, but Paul argued that belief in Jesus created social and religious equality among Christians (Gal. 3:19-29), erasing inclusion or exclusion based on gender, ethnicity, language, or social class. Paul reminded the Galatians that baptism removed past distinctions. He wrote:

> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

Paul's focus on Baptism is not a new initiation rite he invented. Paul adapts the Jewish practice of ritual immersion in the *mikveh*—a pool with running water into which a man or woman descended to mark different times and transitions in their lives. Both men and women in the Jewish community already made use of the *mikveh*, or immersion pool, as a ritual of purification; Immersion in water was already a gender-inclusive ritual in Judaism. Paul's theology retrieves the vision of inclusiveness of male and female. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." God's creation of humanity as male and female is the basic division among persons. When Paul asserts that in baptism "there is no longer male or female," he is dignifying women who have equal status with men as those initiated by baptism in Christ.

When Paul asserts that in baptism "there is no longer male or female," he is dignifying women who have equal status with men as those initiated by baptism in Christ.

In Paul's theology, baptism dissolves major sources of division among people—gender, ethnicity, and class. Through baptism, the community of men and women becomes unified.

The Letter to the Corinthians

Paul's idea of oneness of women and men in Christ is also reflected in his letter to the Corinthians.

The Greek city of Corinth came to an end with the Roman conquest. Later, Julius Caesar re-founded the city, and Augustus declared Corinth the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.[10]

Corinth lies between two sea ports. Eventually, the city became a major commercial center and encouraged several migrations. The residents of the city included poor immigrants from Italy as well as freed slaves of Greek, Syrian, Egyptian and Jewish origins.[11]

The immigrants brought with them their customs and religious traditions. The Egyptian goddess, Isis, and the Greek healing god, Asclepius, were among the many deities honored in the city. Corinth also hosted the Isthmian Games to honor the gods.[12] This is the environment of Paul's ministry.

Paul's Mission in Corinth

Paul established the Corinthian church in the midst of a multi-cultural society around 51 CE. After Paul left Corinth, other missionaries taught a tradition different from his.[13] The conflicting traditions, as well as different moral norms between Jewish-born and Gentile-born members, caused discord in the community, and Chloe's people reported them to Paul (1Cor. 1:11).

Chloe is the only woman directly identified in the letter. Her role in the community is unclear, but she seems to have been recognized as a leader, perhaps the sponsor of a house-church. The problems raised in the message to Paul involved behavior Chloe's people found divisive. In his response, Paul gives advice on many matters. I focus on three issues: sex in marriage (1Cor. 7:1-

40), eating meat associated with ritual worship of pagan gods (1Cor. 8:1-13) and proper dress and behavior of women at worship (1Cor.11:3-16). All of these challenges affected women and required women to be agents in bringing about a solution.

Sex in Marriage

Paul responded to the Corinthians by affirming teaching about sexual relations that was actually the norm in both Jewish tradition and Roman law-- sex in marriage was necessary (1Cor. 7:2) to promote population growth; stable families were associated with the stability of the state.[13] He also said each partner should respect the conjugal rights of the other (1Cor. 7:1-8). Paul affirmed the equality of both husband and wife as persons, but this departed from the social tradition of men granted authority over women, as it would have been understood in the first century. But just as Paul gave authority to the husband, he also gave authority to the wife in their intimate marital relations. This must have been an extraordinary call to men in the Corinthian community to respect the dignity of their wives as persons, to refrain from violence, and to cultivate gentleness.

His greatest concern in this complicated counsel is that men and women are equal as persons.

Involvement in Pagan Worship

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city, a sea-port. Temples to Roman deities memorialized both western gods, and Asian goddesses. Festivals honoring them were often secular holidays. Some men and women in the Christian community evidently thought that participating in these festivals honoring pagan deities didn't compromise their membership or faith in Jesus Christ. According to the reports Paul received, some members who participated in Eucharist also ate food that had been sacrificed to the gods and drank too much. Some men engaged in sexual orgies with sacred prostitutes of the goddess, Aphrodite.[14]

Paul instructed the Corinthians not to associate with people who participated in debauchery (1Cor.5:9-12) nor purchase and eat the meat sacrificed in rituals honoring the Roman gods (1Cor.10:14-22). The effect of Paul's directives was to protect married women from sexual philandering by their husbands, under the excuse that it was a publicly acceptable religious rite, and to reinforce religious, social and moral boundaries that would have been important to parents raising children. Paul supported a practice for both Jews and Gentiles at Corinth that were in fact Jewish kosher rules for consumption of meat. These rules were reflected in the compromise Luke later records in Acts 15:29, "that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication." Gentile men were excused from a Jewish requirement of circumcision, while all Gentile-born members would keep Jewish rules of kosher—a concern about food that predominately affected women's purchase and preparation of family meals in daily life.

Dress and Behavior at Worship

Some Corinthian women, active during Christian prayer services, wanted to abandon the Jewish and Roman custom of wearing a head covering at prayer and prophesying (1Cor. 11:14-17). They preferred to show their long loose hair. This was a custom within the Isis cult, but frowned upon within the Jewish and Roman traditions at worship. Jews believed loose hair was a symbol of uncleanliness (Nm. 4:18; Lev. 13:45),[15] while well-dressed Roman women covered their hair with a cloth.[16]

Paul attempts to justify his counsel starting with the fact that Christ is the head of the Church.

He has distinguished the Christian community from the synagogue by suspending the rule that men wear a skull-cap or prayer-shawl. Thus, in the church, he rules that any man who prays or prophesies with a covering on his head disgraces his head. Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head, who is Christ (1 Cor. 11:4-7). Paul refers to Jewish and Roman traditions relative to head coverings for both men and women at worship. But these arguably are regional customs. The main focus seems to be tensions in the community over how Jewish and Gentile women should dress at religious services.

The ministerial role of women in the Pauline church is more clearly widened in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Interestingly, though, Paul does not forbid women from prophesying. He actually supports this expression, a gift that both men and women can receive from the Spirit. His greatest concern in this complicated counsel is that men and women are equal as persons. "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, but all things come from God" (I Cor. 11:11-12).

Paul concludes his instruction to the Corinthians by reminding them that they are all one in Christ, but they each have unique gifts to be used for the good of the community (1Cor. 12:4-32). He uses the metaphor of a body with many parts. This image of a body with many parts would have been understood by the community in a visual association with the Asclepius cult. People who felt themselves or a loved one healed by the deity left a symbol of gratitude at the temple which represented that part of the body that had been cured, such as the head, the arm, the ear, the leg, or the foot.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul reinforces his theology that baptism wipes away all past distinctions of religion, social status and gender. The ministerial role of women in the Pauline church is more clearly widened in Paul's letter to the Romans.

The Letter to the Romans

Paul's letter to the Romans was likely written between 54 and 58 CE. He wrote the letter to introduce himself to the community and to gain their support for future ministries. It is the longest and most informative on the roles Christians played in the early Church.

Susan Hylen discussed the evidence that exists about the equality of men and women within Roman cities and relationship of wives to husbands. She cites examples of women being under the control of their fathers not their husbands. After their father's death, both the daughters and sons inherit his property. Some women even owned businesses, financed building projects and sponsored some of the festivals to honor the gods.[17]

Women didn't participate in legislative or judicial tasks, but they did engage in commerce. They bought and sold goods and worked in the market place with their husbands.[18] These women could be both wealthy and influential. Paul acknowledges some of these women in his closing greeting to the church at Rome (Rom. 16:1-15).

He identified the women in various roles--as his fellow-workers, as a deacon and an apostle. Priscilla (Prisca) is mentioned several times in the New Testament (1Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19; Acts 18:2, 18, 26 and Rom. 16:3). Christians met in her house. She instructed Apollos in the faith. Much of the success of the churches in Corinth and Ephesus were likely due to her. Paul refers to both Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, as fellow-workers. The same Greek word describes both of them (Rom. 16:3).

Paul describes Mary as one who labored for the community (Rom16:6), while Tryphaena and

Tryphosa labored with him in ministry (Rom. 16:12). In Paul's letter to the Philippians, women are both fellow-workers and labor with him in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:2-4).[19]

Phoebe is referred to as a deacon or minister of the church at Cenchreae. The word, minister, is used to identify Phoebe, Apollos and Paul himself (Rom. 16:1, 1Cor. 3:5). The Greek word is the same for all three leaders. Phoebe is also the messenger to the Romans for Paul and a helper of many.

Paul uses the title apostle for Junia (Junius/Junias) and Andronicus (Rom. 16:7). He extends the concept of an apostle beyond the twelve disciples of Jesus. He calls himself an apostle (1 Cor. 1:1). The same Greek word is used for Junia and Andronicus (Rom. 16:7).[20] Paul clearly sees both men and woman as servants of God (1Cor. 3:9; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1-2), but with varying gifts and roles in the Church.[21]

Changes in Ecclesial View of Women after Paul

Paul began his ministry within a multi-cultural society of the first century. Educated in the context of Greco-Roman culture and Jewish law, Paul extended Jesus' teaching of equality and service to all. Paul established churches in Galatia and Corinth, and preached a message that argued, on biblical and theological grounds, the equality of men and women.

In each community, he taught that baptism makes Christians one in Christ (Gal.3:26-8) which erases differences of gender, ethnicity and social class among individuals. Individual members, equal as persons, may have different gifts and roles within the community, but are still one in Christ. Throughout Paul's letters, he acknowledges that both women and men serve as fellow-workers, ministers and apostles in the Church with him.

Decades after Paul's death, a more diversely populated and geographically extended Church had pastors who dealt with increased participation of women. Some Pastoral Epistles reflect the diversity of roles assumed by laity, and there is evidence that male pastors sometimes became distressed by women's leadership, teaching and influence. In First Timothy the qualification for bishops and deacons were defined (1Tim. 3:8-14) as well as the roles of Christians at worship (1Tim. 2:8-15), but push-back against women who spoke as prophets and teachers emerged.

Some Pastoral Epistles reflect the diversity of roles assumed by laity, and there is evidence that male pastors sometimes became distressed by women's leadership, teaching and influence.

Women may have served as deacons (1Tim. 3:8-11), but their responsibilities were unclear. A pastor eager to limit the role of women injected restrictions on their participation: They were forbidden to teach, have authority over men and were instructed to keep silence at worship while men lifted their "holy hands" in prayer (1Tim. 2:8-15). This restriction had never been imposed earlier by Paul himself in First Corinthians or in Romans.

The restrictions on the role of women in the Church cited in some of the Pastoral Epistles was reinforced by the Council of Trent (1545-63) and Vatican l (1869-1870).[22] It wasn't until Vatican II (1962-5) that the Church accepted the idea that all Christians are called to service through their baptism. However, the consequences for that belief are still being debated. Hopefully, a re-reading of the genuine Pauline texts may provide us with a more accurate understanding of the early Church's concept of baptism. That is my hope! ◆

Endnotes

[1]Susan Smith, "Women's Human, Ecclesial and Missionary Identity," *Mission Studies* 27 (2010): 145.
[2]Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., "The Layman's Call to

the Apostolate," in *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966): 1.3.
[3]Claudia is mentioned in 2 Tim. 4:21 as well as Nympha in Col 4:15. However, Raymond Brown says most scholars believe they are not Pauline texts. See Raymond Brown, *The Introduction to the New Testamen*t (New York: Doubleday, 1997): 441.
[4]Carolyn Osiek, R.S.C.J., *What Are They Saying About the Social Setting of the New Testament?* (Chicago: Society of the Sacred Heart, 1992): 52.
[5]Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (Chicago: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1988): 31.
[6]*Ibid*., p.18.
[7]Denise Lardner Carmody, *Biblical Woman* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1988):127.
[8]Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., "Letter to the Galatians," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968): 237.
[9]Osiek, *Social Settings*, p.6.
[10] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York: Crossroads, 1987): xvi.
[11]Brown, *New Testament*, p.512.
[12]*Ibid*., p. 513.
[13]Thurston, *New Testament*, pp.41-2.
[14]Richard Kugelman, C.P., "The First Letter to the Corinthians," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 254.
[15]Thurston, *New Testament*, p.45. For the most thorough treatment of women at Corinth and the issues of their worship, prophesying and head-coverings, see Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
[16]William G. Thompson, *Paul and His Life's Journey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986):147.
[17] Susan E. Hylen, "5 Myths about Women in the New Testament Period," in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 46 No. 1 (January-February, 2020):55-6.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19]John E. Toews, "The Role of Women in the Church: The Pauline Perspective," in *Direction* 9 No.1 (January, 1980), p.28.
[20]*Ibid.,* p. 27.
[21] Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., "The Letter to the Romans," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 294.
[22]Smith, "Missionary Identity," p.146.

...Equal in Dignity

The Value of Archives

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M.

At the June 2018 meeting of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology held at Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, North Carolina, I was asked to describe "how best to use archives to write history/biography." This assignment asked me to try to recall and share a distillation of thirty years of working in Mercy and related archives.

In a weak moment I agreed to the task—remembering my often climbing the 10-foot ladder in the Dublin Registry of Deeds; the roundabout way I got into the closed archives of Apothecaries Hall in Dublin; the many Mercy, civic, and ecclesial archives to whom I am indebted; and the great Mercy archivists who were so good to me, some of whom have now gone on to that archival Heaven where their deeds of God's Mercy are recorded and kept.

Archival work does not need to be extensive—unless your subject is a large one, and requires your going back to the beginning, and you are resolved to be accurate whenever that is humanly possible.

So, what does work in an archive require?

First, you have to prepare beforehand. This involves:

a) Choosing and, if possible, limiting your subject;
b) Having some idea of the available resources of particular archives;
c) Having some conviction about the difference between primary and secondary sources—for example, distinguishing published books written in the late nineteenth or twentieth century from manuscripts written in the 1830s and 1840s;
d) Understanding how to determine the authenticity, the reliability, of a source;
    - Was the author a witness to what she recounts?
    - Or, is she writing decades or centuries later, and if so, does she document a primary source for what she claims?
    - Or, did she get her information second-hand or through a faulty transcription sent to her (as was necessarily the case with Mary Austin Carroll's presentations of Catherine McAuley's letters)?
e) Then making a list of related topics or questions you want to research in the archive you choose;
f) Studying the catalog, inventory, or finding list of the particular archive in which you are going to work, making careful notes on that archive's relevant contents;
g) Appreciating and making friends with the archivist. She or he knows that archive's holdings better than you do!
h) And finally, understanding that archival work is going to take time: the wider the subject, the more time it will take.

Then you go to work, loaded with paper, pencils, patience, and perseverance.

Here I offer you five (5) examples of archival research:

The "Suscipe" of Catherine McAuley

1) Suppose you understand the necessary difference between a sung version of a prayer, with its need for rhyme and rhythm, and what you suppose was its original prose composition.

Suppose you know what Mary Austin Carroll, Mary Bertrand Degnan, and Angela Bolster give as the original prose wording of Catherine's "Suscipe," and you realize that the wording in Degnan and Bolster differs from that in Carroll.

If you are in an archive that has early biographical manuscripts about Catherine McAuley, written by her contemporaries, you search through them, page by page, and eventually you find the prose composition of the prayer we call the "Suscipe." You find it in Mary Vincent Harnett's Limerick Manuscript[1]: in one of the beautiful illuminated and calligraphic works by Mary Clare Augustine Moore[2]; as well as in the first edition (1868) of The Practical Sayings. . . of Catherine McAuley, compiled by Mary Clare Moore, where it is titled "Act of Resignation."[3] A later, authentic transcript of this prayer is also in the Birr Annals.

Since Mary Vincent Harnett, Mary Clare Augustine Moore, and Mary Clare Moore all lived with Catherine and knew her well, they are early witnesses and primary sources for the prose wording of Catherine's prayer. And their wording of the prayer differs by only one substantive adjective: "unlimited" confidence (in Harnett) and "unbounded" confidence (in the two Moores). Unless there are other early sources you can search through—and there do not seem to be—you decide that these two early versions can both be regarded as the earliest authentic prose wording of Catherine's prayer which we call the "Suscipe," even though Catherine probably did not give a title to this prayer (there is no title to it in Harnett's Limerick Manuscript).

You then feel a great responsibility to get the word out, but how?

You then compare Harnett's and the two Moores's wording with the dozens of printed copies of Catherine's prayer that are seen around the Mercy world in the twenty-first century, and you realize that very few of these recent prose versions have authentic wording. You then feel a great responsibility to get the word out, but how? You use every opportunity you have, and gladly respond to every email inquiry. But inauthentic versions keep appearing; sometimes the wording is based on one or other of the various musical versions that necessarily alter the wording for the sake of rhyme and rhythm; sometimes it is based on Austin Carroll's incorrect version in her Life of Catherine McAuley.[4]

What I have just described is one example of using an archive, a relevant one, to solve an historical problem. In this case an important linguistic problem, the exact prose words of the "Suscipe," the most beloved prayer of Catherine McAuley. The task involves collecting all the data you can find, published and unpublished, dating it, comparing and contrasting, and finally deciding where authenticity resides. [Harnett's text of the "Suscipe" follows the endnotes.]

The Tender Mercy of our God

2) I will share one more wording problem that does not involve manuscripts, but a calendar and a booklet.

You have seen or heard the statement: "The tender Mercy of our God has given us one another." This is a very beautiful statement, and I am often asked about its origin. It is not a saying spoken, written, or composed by Catherine McAuley. I have combed all her letters, all the early biographical manuscripts about her, and all the manuscripts attempting to record her oral instructions, and it is not there. It is, instead, a statement in the Constitutions of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. This Constitution was composed by them in the late twentieth century and subsequently approved in Rome in 1987. The statement is the opening sentence in Part I, Chapter 2, of their 1987 Constitutions, and I believe the statement is still in any Constitutions

they may have revised since then and had approved in Rome.

The reason why so many in the Mercy world think Catherine McAuley composed the statement is probably related to the following circumstance. In the 1990s, Ursula Gilbert, R.S.M., of the Australian Sisters of Mercy, then working at Baggot Street, Dublin, composed and published a Mercy Through the Years Calendar (with flip pages)[5] that was filled with wonderful sayings spoken by and related to the Sisters of Mercy, including some by Catherine McAuley.

On the August 7 page, Ursula put the statement given above, and underneath the statement she printed the word: "Constitutions," meaning the Australian Constitutions. When they subsequently saw that page in the Calendar, many Sisters, Associates, and Friends of Mercy throughout the world must have thought that the word "Constitutions" referred to the first Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy, which was composed by Catherine McAuley in the 1830s and approved in Rome in 1841. Therefore, they and dozens of others began to ascribe the sentence to Catherine McAuley.

The "Preface" and "Introduction" to my edition of the Practical Sayings (of Catherine McAuley) may prove enlightening.

This statement expresses a conviction that Catherine McAuley surely would have shared, but she did not compose this sentence or say it. However, the sentence, usually with Catherine McAuley's name under it, has frequently been painted on walls, printed on greeting cards, stationery, and email closings, and placed in framed pictures or on banners. Catherine must be smiling, and thanking the Australian Sisters of Mercy.

Maxims and Counsels

3) Examination of that particular sentence, which is not a "saying" of Catherine McAuley, leads us to the larger question: "What are the authentic sayings of Catherine McAuley, and where can we find them?"

Obviously, we want to know what Catherine said and wrote. Such sentences are part of her legacy to us, the inspiration and guidance she has left us. But where can we find her authentic words?

An archive can be a big help here, but we need to be discriminating searchers. Not every claim that Catherine said or wrote certain words can be immediately trusted. I have tried to deal with this matter in the Appendix: "A Note on Sources" (pages 377-94) of *The Path of Mercy*, published in 2012, and in the "Introduction" to my 2010 facsimile edition of *The Practical Sayings of Catherine McAuley*, originally compiled and published by Mary Clare Moore (London: Burns, Oates, 1868). Clare had lived for seven years with Catherine at Baggot Street, and for some months in Cork and in Bermondsey, England. The "Preface" and "Introduction" to my edition of the *Practical Sayings* may prove enlightening.

A particular problem arises with respect to the supposed "Maxims and Counsels" of Catherine McAuley that are presented on pages 135-49 of the *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley* first published in 1888.[6] I tried to deal extensively with the *Familiar Instructions* in the "Appendix" of *The Path of Mercy*, and I here repeat some of that analysis, now updated.

Study of the list of "Maxims and Counsels" in the back of the *Familiar Instructions* reveals that Mary Teresa Austin Carroll's writings and the publications and manuscripts available to her were major sources of that list. Among the ninety-five (95) maxims presented, fifteen (15) are accurate or almost accurate quotations from the *Practica*l

Sayings; nineteen (19) are from Catherine McAuley's letters, although not accurately recorded (because Carroll could not deal directly with the autograph letters or with photocopies of them); of the remaining sixty-one (61), many are copied directly from the front pages of the *Familiar Instructions* itself; and several are quoted directly from Carroll's *Life* (1866) though Carroll herself did not ascribe two of these to Catherine McAuley. Of those taken directly from the *Familiar Instructions* itself, at least four (4) are quotations from other authors, not Catherine McAuley: St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Philip Neri combined with St. Teresa of Avila, and Frederick Faber. Finally, some of the maxims remain to be identified.

Two favorite "maxims" listed in the *Familiar Instructions*, ones that Sisters of Mercy frequently quote, are not Catherine's words at all. On page 331 in her *Life* (1866) of Catherine McAuley, Carroll ascribes the saying --"It is better to relieve a hundred imposters—if there be any such—than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty"—to Mary de Chantal McCann, not to Catherine McAuley. And on page 87 of Carroll's *Life*, the words – "There are things the poor prize more highly than gold, though they cost the donor nothing; among these are the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look, and the patient hearing of their sorrows"—are Austin Carroll's own wording, which she does not ascribe to Catherine McAuley.

What was involved in that analysis is a good deal of plain old searching, comparing and contrasting, and some attempt to understand the players involved in and the human circumstances surrounding the publication of the *Familiar Instructions*.

Date of Catherine McAuley's Birth

4) Another area where an archive can be an important source of correct information is in verifying dates. Suppose you have been to Catherine McAuley's grave at Baggot Street, Dublin, and have seen the engraved wording on the marble tombstone over her grave (placed there in the twentieth century). The slab says she was "Born September 29, 1787" [sic] and died "Aged 54," and you are rightly puzzled.

So, you do some archival work in Dublin, perhaps at the Registry of Deeds and the National Library of Ireland. You discover that in 1783 Catherine's father James McGauley sold property on Fishamble Street, and that the sale was dated April 29, 1783 and registered on May 8, 1783.

So, the beautiful marble slab on Catherine's grave was incorrectly engraved, using incorrect data in an early biographical manuscript.

Then at the National Library, in Volume 17 of Betham's *Abstracts of Prerogative Wills* . . . 1781-1791, you discover that the will of "James McGauley" was dated July 18, 1783, and probated on August 2, 1783. The fact that his will was probated on August 2, 1783, means that Catherine's father had died sometime in late July 1783. This also means that Catherine could not have been born in 1787, four years after her father's death, there being no evidence whatsoever that her mother remarried after his death.

So, the beautiful marble slab on Catherine's grave was incorrectly engraved, using incorrect data in an early biographical manuscript. It has misinformed those who are unable to do archival research, or who do not have a chance to read the secondary sources that would inform them.

Those who have visited Catherine's grave will also see the incorrect wording of a line from Catherine's "Suscipe" on the stone wall plaque

overlooking her grave. This is another reason why we need archival research before we make public statements in print or stone.

Publication of *Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*

5) One further illustration may be helpful. It involves researching the circumstances surrounding the writing and publication of particular secondary sources. In this case, the books are Mary Frances Bridgeman's *Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy* and its *Abridgment*, both published in London by Robson and Son in 1866.

The fact that there are numerous copies of these large, well-bound books, presumably in every Mercy archive in the world, does not automatically make them authoritative accounts of the purpose, values, and recommended behavior of the Sisters of Mercy as envisioned by Catherine McAuley. However, because they are so available and look so sturdy and authoritative, unsuspecting researchers take them for some kind of definitive word.

Her paragraphs do not include any of the excessive, class-conscious discriminations between "choir" and "lay" sisters that are explicitly outlined in the Guide and its Abridgment.

The circumstances surrounding the writing and publication of the *Guide* and its *Abridgmen*t are these. Mary Francis Bridgeman, the superior in Kinsale, persuaded the then superior of the Limerick community to call a meeting—called a "General Chapter"—in March 1864 of all the superiors of the Mercy congregations then existing, especially in Ireland and England. The purpose of the meeting in Limerick was to agree on a uniform interpretation of the customs, and of the *Rule of the Sisters of Mercy* that was approved in Rome in 1841.

In preparation for the meeting, Bridgeman drafted the *Guide* and the *Abridgment* of it. At the meeting, the superiors who were present voted to affirm the *Abridgment*. But here is the key fact: Among the seventeen who attended the March 1864 meeting in Limerick and endorsed the *Abridgment* were the superiors of only four of the autonomous convents Catherine McAuley had founded: Charleville, Cork, Limerick and Birr, but not the superiors of the other six: Baggot Street, Tullamore, Carlow, Bermondsey, Galway, and Birmingham. Absent from the meeting were those in Ireland and England who chose not to attend or were prevented from attending, as well as the superiors in North America, South America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Yet, unfortunately, the *Guide* and its *Abridgment* are sometimes assumed to have a universal authority they never enjoyed, and these books are sometimes cited as if they reflected the thinking of Catherine McAuley, which they sometimes do not.

For example, in the fair copy of the *Rule and Constitutions* that Catherine composed and that was later approved in Rome, she had three relatively short paragraphs in the chapter "On Lay Sisters." These paragraphs are inclusive and appreciative of lay sisters and liken their service to that of Jesus Christ who "was constantly engaged serving others" and who will "most generously reward every exertion which they make for love of Him." Catherine's three generous-minded paragraphs are in stark contrast to the eight and a half, detailed pages in the *Guide* and the three pages in the *Abridgment*. Her paragraphs do not include any of the excessive, class-conscious discriminations between "choir" and "lay" sisters that are explicitly outlined in the *Guide* and its *Abridgment*.

The original manuscript of the original *Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy* which

was composed and handwritten by Catherine McAuley in the early 1830s is available in only one Mercy Archives in the world (Mercy Congregational Archives in Dublin). A fair copy of it—made by Mary Clare Moore, incorporating Archbishop Daniel Murray's suggested revisions and concluding with his handwritten approval of the document—is dated May 3, 1835, and is preserved in the Bermondsey (London) archives of the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy (i.e., Sisters of Mercy) in Great Britain.

The chapter "Of Lay Sisters" does not appear in Catherine's original manuscript, but it does appear in Clare Moore's fair copy of it that Archbishop Daniel Murray approved and dated May 3, 1835, and this fair copy was apparently used to make the copy that was sent to Rome in late 1839 or early 1840. The *Rule and Constitutions* that was approved and confirmed in Rome in 1841, in Italian, also contains the three-paragraph chapter "Of Lay Sisters." That chapter was presumably composed by Catherine and inserted in the fair copy and therefore in the copy sent to Rome. (To understand this complicated process further please see pages 269-71 of *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy.*)

I think it is fair to say that down through the decades after 1866, many Mercy lay sisters suffered—in some Mercy congregations, but not in all of them—from the overly discriminating provisions for them outlined so unnecessarily in the *Guide* and its *Abridgment*. This circumstance is another illustration of why we need to do archival research to uncover the relative merits of existing materials, no matter how widely available they are.

In summary, if you ask me "how best to use archives to write history/biography," I think my answer, if it is an answer, is simply that research is complicated. But I do not want to discourage anyone. We need more, not less, archival work! But like all true research, it is demanding and takes time.

My primary motive in these remarks is to enlist help. I recognize that the Sisters of Mercy were not founded for the purpose of doing archival research or publishing books or articles. But that research and those books and articles can play a role, sometimes even a necessary one, in the future well-being of the Sisters of Mercy and their Gospel mission. If research is carefully done and goes back to reliable sources; and if its goal is accurate expression of the texts, facts, and values we hold dear, then it may, I trust, contribute to the merciful foundation on which we stand and minister as Sisters of Mercy.

As the Mercy family, our ministries on behalf of God's people will always need to rest on sound understandings and all kinds of relevant knowledge.

As the Mercy family, our ministries on behalf of God's people will always need to rest on sound understandings and all kinds of relevant knowledge. And this conviction also applies to biblical research, theological research, and social justice research. The ongoing work of *The MAST Journal*, of the members of Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, and of Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, North Carolina, is crucial to providing that solid foundation, at least for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

Moreover, we need to actively encourage new or up-dated research on many Mercy topics. We also need to urge our leaders to seek out and encourage some sisters and others to engage in advanced study in scripture, theology, and other Mercy-related fields so they will be equipped to do the research that is needed.

For example, we in the Americas need published accounts of the following:

- A history of the Sisters of Mercy in Central and South America, and the Caribbean
- A history of the Sisters of Mercy in Guam and the Philippines
- A collection of all the available writings and correspondence of Frances Warde
- Biographies of such early founders as Mary Teresa Maher (Cincinnati) and Mary Patricia Waldron (Philadelphia)—similar to *Like a Tree by Running Water*, the excellent biography of Mary Baptist Russell (San Francisco) by Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.
- A history of Mercy health care in the Americas
- A history of Mercy education in the Americas
- And this list is just the beginning!

Members of the Mercy family worldwide also need to urge the Members of Mercy International Association (MIA) to re-establish the Mercy International Research Commission which functioned from 2004 until it was terminated by MIA in 2009. We need such a Research Commission today, just as we need the Mercy International Archives Committee that was founded in 2001 but was also terminated by MIA in 2009.

A capable Mercy International Research Commission could assist us in many ways:

- Identifying needed research projects and able researchers;
- Identifying funding resources for travel to archives and accommodation;
- Establishing and promoting modern standards for Mercy publications;
- Selecting and publishing volumes of key Mercy research articles in Scripture and Theology.
- Calling forth and promoting the research of those who will come after us.

I think Catherine McAuley would endorse such efforts, even though she often said, and rightly, that, "The prosperity or advancement of the Institute does not depend on, nor is it to be attributed to the good reader [or] writer."[7]

Catherine McAuley was herself a serious reader and a studious woman who, according to Clare Moore, "set great value on spiritual writing."[8] And as she once wrote: "The adage -- 'never too old to learn'—is a great comfort to me."[9] May that adage—with its implied continued learning and research—also be "a great" though indirect "comfort" to all in the Mercy family, and to all those among whom we serve.

Perhaps Catherine's most plain-spoken and central reminder to those who do research, including archival research is the warning she gave about the study of Jesus Christ (applicable also, one might say, to the study of Catherine's life and values):

> We find those who can enumerate very particularly all that Jesus Christ said and did, but what does He care for that? He said and did so, not that we should recount it in words, but show Him in our lives, in our daily practice.[10] ◆

Endnotes

[1]Limerick Manuscript, in Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, 2000): 188-89.

[2] Clare Augustine Moore's artwork is preserved in the Mercy Congregational Archives, Herbert Street, Dublin, and copies of some of it are displayed in Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street, Dublin.

[3] [Mary Clare Moore], comp., *A Little Book of Practical Sayings, Advices and Prayers of . . . Mary Catharine [sic] McAuley* (London: Burns, Oates, 1868); facsimile edition, Mary C. Sullivan, ed. (Rochester, New York: Sisters of Mercy, 2010): 32-33. Cited hereafter as PS.

[4] [Mary Teresa Austin Carroll], *Life of Catherine McAuley* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1866): 237.

[5] *Mercy Through the Years Calendar* (Dublin: Mercy

International Centre, 1995). See August 7.
[6] *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley*, ed. Sisters of Mercy, St. Louis, Mo. (St. Louis: E. Carreras, 1888); revised edition (St. Louis: Vincentian Press, 1927).
[7] PS, 3.
[8] PS, 28.
[9] Mary C. Sullivan, ed., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004): 205.
[10] PS, 25.

SUSCIPE

My God, I am Thine for all eternity; teach me to cast my whole self into the arms of Thy Providence with the most lively, unlimited confidence in Thy compassionate tender pity. Grant, O Most Merciful Redeemer, that whatever Thou dost ordain or permit may always be acceptable to me; take from my heart all painful anxiety, suffer nothing to afflict me, but sin; nothing to delight me, but the hope of coming to the possession of Thee, my God, in Thy own everlasting kingdom. Amen.

[This text of Catherine McAuley's prayer is found in the Limerick Manuscript written by Mary Vincent Harnett, on page 181 of Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*. This prayer is also found in the first publication of the *Practical Sayings, Advices and Prayers of...Catharine McAuley* [sic] compiled by Mary Clare Moore (London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1868). In the *Practical Sayings*, where the prayer is titled "Act of Resignation," the word "unbounded" is used where "unlimited" appears here, and there is one other very minor difference in wording ("thine" in place of "thy" in the last phrase).]

The Poetry of Catherine McAuley

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M.

Catherine McAuley (1778-1841), the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, did not devote her life to writing poetry or aim to be a good or even a satisfactory poet. Though she lived in the era of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, she apparently did not know their poetry. But according to sisters who lived with her, she "had a natural talent for composing verses in a playful style and would often sing them to some cheerful tune with admirable simplicity."[1]

But why would the founder of a religious congregation dedicated to performing difficult, daily works of mercy among the poor, the sick, and the neglected, occasionally devote time, often late at night, to writing poems, let alone playful poems of all things! Founders of religious congregations of women are not supposed to "take time out" to write poetry, are they? Their many serious responsibilities as founders certainly preclude such nonessentials—or so the stereotype claims.

Yet we know that Teresa of Avila, whom Catherine McAuley studied and admired, often wrote poems. Scholars of her writings, Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, claim that "besides her lyric-mystical poetry," Teresa also wrote poetry "as an instrument of spiritual formation for her daughters."[2]

Catherine McAuley also wrote poems for similar reasons.

Her poems, and whatever time she spent on them, were not intended to perfect her poetic skill or secure her public reputation as a poet. They were simply intended to help her Mercy community; to let them share in the details of her long journeys; to encourage them; to lift their spirits in painful situations; to guide their own exercise of leadership; to express her affection for them; to provide a healthy dose of "nonsense"; and to be for them a loving, human "prop" when they were weary.[3]

Writing poetry was evidently also a "prop" for Catherine herself when she was worn out by her many travels to found new Mercy communities. Replying in a poem from Galway (#174), to a poem written to her by Marianne Beckett, a new postulant in the Dublin community, Catherine admitted:

> Tho' so long I've delayed to reply to your note
> I never unmindful could be
> of the metre so varied – so sweet that you wrote
> and so kindly to gratify me
>
> When not far removed from life's earliest stage
> at Rhyming I never could stop
> and beginning to feel the pressure of age
> I lean on it now as a prop
>
> It affords some support and help on the way
> recalling the days of my youth
> In which 'twas my pastime, my folly, my play
> and so it is still in good truth
>
> Of this one poor talent I've made such a hack
> That—unimproved it must remain
> and ah, when obliged to deliver it back
> I'll have losses much rather than gain

Probably not many respected poets today would admit that their own rhyming also serves as a personal "prop," and whether as a poet Catherine is simply a "hack," I leave to the reader and to poetry's bona-fide critics to decide.

In the same poem to Marianne Beckett, Catherine again expressed her frequent wish to establish in the Dublin novitiate a "Nonsensical Club," with its own "Professor of folly":

> I sometimes wish that we could form
> A little foolish party

who common sense would loudly scorn
and aim at laughing hearty.

She proposed this playful scheme in 1840, even as serious-minded prelates in Rome were microscopically considering whether or not to approve the original *Rule of the Sisters of Mercy*. Happily, they did not know what the Founder herself was presently up to!

Let us look briefly at a few of Catherine's poems—for example, #15 to Mary Ann Doyle. Catherine wrote this poem one night, on the unused back of an envelope that had contained a letter sent to her. She and her sisters had been working all day, for seven months, at a temporary cholera hospital set up during the Dublin epidemic of 1832. The poem is written to cheer the exhausted community, but especially to cheer Mary Ann Doyle who had injured her knees as she moved from bed to bed without standing up, the cholera cots lying low on the ground, with holes to easily emit the death-causing diarrhea:

Dear Sister Doyle, accept from me
for your poor suffering martyrs
a laurel wreath to crown each knee
in place of former garters

Since fatal Cholera appeared
you've scarce been seen to stand,
nor danger for yourself e'er feared
when death overspread the land

While on your knees from Bed to Bed
you quickly moved about
it did not enter in your head
that knees could e'er wear out

You've hurt the marrow in the bone
imploring aid and pity
and every Cardinal in Rome
would say you saved the City

Now that the story of your fame
in annals may be seen
we'll give each wounded knee a name
Cholera—and—Cholerene

Or look at poem #103, written in early December 1838 to Mary Elizabeth Moore, the fearful superior of the new Mercy foundation in Limerick, and probably left on Elizabeth's pillow the morning Catherine returned to Dublin. It encourages Elizabeth not to be overly strict or precise in her new role as superior, and not to be overwhelmed by her new duties, but rather to govern with realism, sweetness and affection:

My Dearest Sister M.E.

Don't let crosses vex or tease
Try to meet all with peace & ease
notice the faults of every Day
but often in a playful way
And when you seriously complain
let it be known—to give you pain
Attend to one thing—at a time
you've 15 hours from 6 to 9
be mild and sweet in all your ways
now & again—bestow some praise
avoid all solemn declaration
all serious, close investigation
Turn what you can into a jest
and with few words dismiss the rest
keep patience ever at your side
you'll want it for a constant guide
Shew fond affection every Day
and above all—Devoutly Pray
That God may bless the charge He's given
and make of you—their guide to Heaven.

The parting advice of your ever affectionate

M.C.M.

In her acrostic poem #153, Catherine is teasing Peter Butler, the English priest who invited the Sisters of Mercy to make a foundation in Bermondsey, London, in late 1839. In this poem to Father Butler whom she deeply admired, Catherine playfully complains about two things: the demeaning opinions of some of the English people about the Irish, and the cold, wet weather

along the River Thames:

F = For wild Irish did you take us
A = As some English folk would make us
T = Thinking we just ran away – from
H = Hirish houses made of clay
E = Ever glad to change our station
R = Rushing to another nation

B = Bermondsey – we'll not forget
U = Under cold and damp & wet
T = 'Tis true we must all seasons meet
L = Leaving our calm, our loved retreat
E = Engaged in sorrows not our own
R = Refreshed—by all that's neat at home

Finally, let's look at poem #213, which Catherine wrote in 1840 to a little girl in Carlow whose father had recently died—little Fanny Warde, the niece of Mary Frances Warde. With this poem and its accompanying "kisses," Catherine gives her "doat'y [darling]" little Fanny a precious brooch (the "this" of the first stanza) that had once belonged to Catherine's beloved niece Mary Teresa McAuley who died of tuberculosis in November 1833. For seven years Catherine had saved that brooch out of deep affection for Mary Teresa. In this poem, as in other poems and letters toward the end of her life, Catherine calls herself a "Granny."

Though this is very dear to me
For reasons strong and many
I give it with fond love to Thee
My doat'y—"little Fanny"

Six kisses too from out my heart
So sweet tho' from a Granny
With one of them you must not part
My doat'y—"little Fanny"

What shall I wish now, let me see
which I wish, most of any
That you—a nice good child shall be
My doat'y—"little Fanny"

Catherine McAuley did not write her poems for herself or for the nameless world-at-large. Each of her poems was addressed to a particular recipient – usually a particular Sister of Mercy, often with the wish or understanding that it would also be shared with that sister's Mercy community.

At least six (6) Sisters of Mercy, including novices and postulants, sent poems or poetical letters to Catherine McAuley. These poems delighted her, and she usually responded in poetry. To a long poem from Mary Teresa Vincent Potter in Limerick, about her recent profession of vows, Catherine replied immediately (#156):

My Sweet Sister Poet – I think it much better
Not be waiting to write a very long letter
But acknowledge at once I'm deeply your
debtor. . . .

Concluding her poetic response to a poem from Mary Ursula Frayne, Catherine writes:

As I have not got a poetical name / Borrowing yours – I beg to remain / The affectionate Mother of Ursula Frayne (#130).

And at the end of a long poem (#43) about the journey to Carlow in April 1837 – addressed to "My Dearest darling youngest Daughter" – Catherine begs Anna Maria Harnett, a new postulant in the Dublin community:

Write to me soon a poetical letter
no matter how long–the more nonsense the Better
I hope e'er long to write you another
and remain your fond and affectionate Mother.

After Catherine died on November 11, 1841, the grief-stricken Mary Ann Doyle, then superior of the Mercy community in Tullamore, described Catherine as a "light to one's feet, the stay and encouragement of one's very soul in the everyday difficulties and perplexities of life."[4]

In *Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican II speaks rather solemnly about each religious congregation's need to return continually to "the original inspiration

behind a given community" and to accord "loyal recognition and safekeeping . . . to the spirit of founders."[5] In 1965, the Fathers of Vatican II probably did not have in mind the poems and playfulness of the religious founders they extolled. In this their vision was narrow, unmindful of the enabling joyfulness that carries a religious congregation -- in its beginning and ever after-- through all the difficulties and perplexities of trying to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, in this world and in this church.

For the real key to the longevity of a founder's influence upon her religious congregation is, yes, the strength of the mission and spiritual formation she inaugurates, but also the human joyfulness, cheerfulness, and laughter she creates and inspires, even in such homey, simple ways as writing loving poems.

Catherine regarded "Union and Charity" – such as we see embedded in her poems – as essential features of the Mercy congregation. Without unity of mind and heart, and fidelity to Jesus Christ's dying request, "Love one another as I have loved you," Catherine felt, and said, that all our public works and labors "will be as froth before God," or like "Vanity and Smoke!"[6]

I, therefore, dare to believe that the gift of Catherine McAuley's poems and poetical letters -- trivial as some may seem at first sight–is an essential element of the enabling charism of cheerful mercifulness that the Spirit of God offered to her and the early sisters, and still offers to all Sisters of Mercy for the sake of those they serve.◆

Endnotes

[1]Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 116. Hereafter cited as CMcATM.

[2] Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1985): 371.

[3] All the poems in this essay are contained in *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841*, ed. Mary C. Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), and are referred to by their numbers in that volume.

[4] CMcATM, 75.

[5] Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. Joseph Gallagher (New York: America Press, 1966): 468.

[6] Mary C. Sullivan, ed., *A Shining Lamp: The Oral Instructions of Catherine McAuley* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017): 127, 125.

Discussion Questions

(Bilderback) Of all the recommendations for ecological protection and conservation, what actions have you taken that express your care for the earth? Think of your residence, your ministerial setting, your neighborhood. Where do you see evidence that others share this concern? What changes do you see being made that are earth-conscious—that would not have received attention a decade ago?

(Criscione) As you survey the biblical references in this article, which one is particularly uncomfortable for you to read, and which ones the most inspiring when it comes to treatment of "foreigners," sojourners, and "outsiders"?

(Doyle) Do you occasionally watch "action" and "crime" films? How does your choice of entertainment promote a non-violent consciousness? Bringing the issue close to home, what are alternatives to taking revenge on people who have wronged you? If no retaliation is taken, how does a person avoid "victim mode"? If people don't fight back or resist injustice, aren't they just enabling injustice or violence to continue?

(Erickson) What have you learned by actively supporting immigrants through volunteering at transitional housing, educating them through ESL, "getting out there" at demonstrations, or seeking a border experience—that you would not have learned by reading, or taking a course on the subject of immigrants, their plight and their rights? Conversely, what do you realize from reading and study that you wouldn't know from going to the border or demonstrating?

(Evans) What have you learned about yourself from family members, friends, co-workers, parishioners, students, clients or entertainers who are "persons of ethnicity" or of an ethnicity different from yours? What are the most important differences you sense between yourself as a member of the privileged culture and "them" as belonging to the less privileged population?

(Kerrigan) Do you notice any leadership or ministerial roles that women have been assuming in the post-Vatican II church—that weren't as evident when you were growing up? Where are the growth areas for women's visibility in the church that you think should be promoted? If baptism in Paul's theology dissolved differences of gender, ethnicity and social class in the faith community, what is the theological conversion of the status quo that still needs to be carried out?

Schubert) What do you feel when you act from your "inner savior" to help others? How do women avoid burn-out from their instinct to help others, or the responsibilities they feel they are obligated to assume? How do women know when they are enabling people

who aren't taking responsibility for their own lives? What is the evidence that women's service and ministry to those in need is fruitful and empowering?

(Sullivan) The carver of Catherine McAuley's grave-marker got the date of her death wrong. What difference would it make to you if someone assigned you the wrong birth year or a different birth year? Do you agree with the "characteristics" that supposedly mark you as belonging to a particular generation? What can you say about the year you were born and how that period of time marks your sense of self?

(Sullivan) If Catherine McAuley's playful verse can be said to be part of the Mercy charism, do you have some examples of your own ditties, or rhymes you have received from community members? Do you remember the words of novitiate or community songs set to well-known melodies? When was the last time you sang a silly song? Is there a community member who keeps alive this expression of Mercy's light-heartedness?

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

New _____ Renewal _____

I want to subscribe to The MAST Journal for:

1 year _____ 2 years _____
($20.00 US; $30.00 outside US) ($40.00 US; $60.00 outside US)

Name _____
Address _____
_____
_____
Email _____

Please make payment by check payable to Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (US funds drawn on a US financial institution), money order/international money order or US currency. Mail to Julia Upton, RSM, St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791. Email at jupton@sistersofmercy.org.

To pay by credit card go to our website: www.mastrsm.org and click on The MAST Journal tab for instructions.

Contributors

Mary Bilderback, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) taught biology at Georgian Court University in New Jersey for twenty-five years. She holds a B.A. in English, an M.A. in Spirituality, Cosmology and Culture, as well as certificates in Master Gardening, and Northeast Organic Farming. Her graduate study in biology was done at the University of Pennsylvania, where she worked in various medical research laboratories. Prior to entering the Sisters of Mercy, she was a journalist-- writing for the *Asbury Park New Jersey Press*, and the *New York Daily News*. Her poetry and prose have been published in local newspapers and poetry anthologies. Most recently she has contributed several columns to the Global Sisters Report sponsored by *National Catholic Reporter*. She currently lives in a convent two blocks from the ocean in New Jersey, where she continues to be involved with water issues and the environmental projects Water Spirit and Clean Ocean Action.

Mary Criscione, R.S.M. (West Midwest) earned a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies, New Testament, at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. She has taught scripture in the Pastoral Ministry Graduate Program at Santa Clara University. She currently teaches at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, CA. She has contributed several articles to *The MAST Journal*.

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (West Midwest) received her M.Ed. from the University of San Francisco and a Masters in Liturgical Studies from St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. She has served as Director of Mercy Center Auburn, Director of Faith Formation, Diocese of Sacramento and Novitiate Minister for the U.S. Novitiate. She was a member of the editorial committee for *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy.* A Mercy historian, she has published *Like a Tree by Running Water, the Story of Mary Baptist Russell, California's First Sister of Mercy* and is writing the history of California's Mercy Community in Sacramento.

Kathleen Erickson, **R.S.M**., (West Midwest) has a background in education and administration, and spent nearly 20 years at the U.S.-Mexican border after travel and Spanish study in Latin America. She is co-founder and former director of the Women's Intercultural Center in Anthony, New Mexico, a place for immigrant women. She is trained in spiritual direction and interested in evolutionary spirituality. Kathleen provided spiritual counseling to undocumented women in Federal Detention in El Paso, Texas, and spent two months with immigrant women and children in the South Texas Family Detention Center in Dilley, Texas. An advocate for immigrant rights, she returned to Omaha, Nebraska in 2009 and helped to start the Immigrant Detainee Accompaniment Program (IDAP) at the Douglas County jail. She has organized many delegations to the border, and spent time in Honduras. She remains connected with immigration work at local and national levels.

Jean Evans, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds an M.A. from the Univ. of San Francisco in Applied Spirituality and a D.Th. in Christian Spirituality from the University of South Africa. After teaching high school in California for fifteen years, Jean volunteered with the Sisters of Mercy of Johannesburg, South Africa from 1984-2012. She was engaged primarily in the academic and vocational training of adults and marginalized youth in Winterveldt, Mmakau, Soweto and Pretoria. She introduced students to the prayer of the Taizé Community (France) and facilitated youth and young adult retreats. She was executive secretary of the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa from 2005-2010. She was adjunct professor at St. John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria and St. Augustine College in Johannesburg. She returned to the U.S. in 2012. She has published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*, *Catholic San Francisco*, and has several past articles in *The MAST Journal*. She continues to write and publish articles on spirituality, faith and society.

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds a Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Foundation, a D.Min. from Chicago Theological Seminary, and an M.A. from Loyola University in Chicago. She has been a professor of social science and religious studies, as well as an administrator in college and university settings. She served as adjunct professor at St. Xavier University and System Director of Mission and Spirituality for Provena Health and Provena Senior Services. She is currently Assistant Administrator at Mercy Convent in Chicago, and serves as a personal contact person for West Midwest community members. A companion and friend to many retired sisters, she is regularly their end-of-life advocate and funeral coordinator. She is a frequent contributor to *The MAST Journal* and serves on the editorial board.

Judith Schubert, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) holds a Ph.D. in Theology (New Testament) from Fordham University, an M.A. from Providence College and a B.A. from Georgian Court University in Lakewood, New Jersey. In her prior ministry teaching music at Mount Saint Mary's Academy in Watchung, New Jersey, Judith substitute- taught an Old Testament class and found her passion-- teaching Scripture. She is Professor of Theology at Georgian Court University, having served on the faculty since 1978. She is the former department Chair, and former Director of the Graduate Program. She's taught all the biblical courses at the undergraduate and graduate level and been lecturer in Women of Wisdom Series. She has published *The Gospel of John: Question by Question,* many journal articles, and *101 Questions and Answers on Women in the New Testament* (Paulist Press). She has contributed several articles to *The MAST Journal.*

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M. (NyPaW) holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in English from the Univ. of Notre Dame, and an M.Th. in systematic theology from the University of London. She is presently Emerita professor of Language and Literature at Rochester Institute of Technology as well as dean emerita of its College of Liberal Arts. She is the author of numerous articles and seminal works on the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, including *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1995), *The Friendship of Florence Nightingale and Mary Clare Moore (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley*, 1818-1841 (Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2004), *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley* (CUA Press, 2012) and *A Shining Lamp: The Oral Instructions of Catherine McAuley* (CUA Press of America, 2017).

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

Institute of the Sisters of Mercy
of the Americas
West Midwest Community
535 Sacramento Street
Auburn, CA 95603