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Mercy Spirituality

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Dear Readers,

This has been a wonderful year for the Sisters of Mercy throughout the Americas. The Institute is a reality, our Constitutions are approved, and we are committed to continued work with the poor. Throughout all of our endeavors we are conscious of the legacy of Catherine McAuley and the lens her life provides for our Christian discipleship.

Catherine's motivation was Christ and even though adopting her prayers and devotions may be impractical and anachronistic, a study of her attitudes and aspirations can keep us in touch with her legacy and our vocation. Such is the design of this issue containing articles by Mercy authors who are experts in the field of spirituality and in Catherine McAuley's writings.

A word about subscriptions. Please continue to send new subscription information and money to Julia Upton, RSM, Department of Religious Studies, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York 11439. Julia should also receive any change of address information. Only editorial correspondence should be sent to me.

Again, thank you for your continued interest in The MAST Journal. We look forward to hearing from you.

Peace,

Maryanne Stevens, RSM

The MAST Journal is published three times a year (November, March and July) by the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology. Members of the Editorial Board are Srs. Maryanne Stevens (Omaha), Joanne Lappetito (Baltimore), Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt (Burlingame), Elizabeth McMillan (Pittsburgh) and Julia Upton (Brooklyn). Editorial correspondence should be mailed to Maryanne Stevens, RSM, 9411 Ohio Street, Omaha, Nebraska, 68134. All subscription correspondence (change of address, etc.) should be mailed to Julia Upton, RSM, Department of Religious Studies, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York 11439.

Towards a Theology of Mercy

Mary Ann Scofield, RSM

What is meant by a theology of Mercy? The word "theology" means literally God-talk. In a broader sense, it means reflecting upon our human experience in the light of the God we know. For us as Christians, theology or God-talk centers on the complete message of our God to us, the message of Jesus. For us specifically as Sisters of Mercy, the God we speak of and the God who speaks to us is the God of Mercy; as Catherine McAuley wrote: "Mercy [is] the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those desirous of following Him."[1] Working towards a theology of mercy then means looking at Jesus' way of merciful love to find the principles we need to interpret our own experience of mercy.

Catherine must have reflected often on her own experience in faith. From an early age, Catherine experienced her own father as not only having a tender love for the poor, but as doing something concrete for them. In the midst of her own non-Catholic upbringing, she was perhaps free from a number of the conventions of a traditional Catholic and therefore, able to feel more keenly with the poor who were suffering under strict penal law and deprived of any instructions in their faith.

. . . (Jesus') understanding of his own faith . . . was constantly in response to his changing situation.

In her later years, Catherine remained a woman who let such experiences speak to her. She listened for ministry out of this discernment. She was quick to be flexible, responding to need with deep faith informing/reforming her as the world and needs of God's people were changing, rather than bringing something fixed to a changing world. She herself said that God can bend and change and form and re-form any creature to fit to the purposes God designs.

The same thing is true for Jesus when we look at the gospels. His understanding of his own faith and all that he did and taught was constantly in response to his changing situation. When someone came who was sick, he healed. If someone needed teaching, he taught. He knew and understood the needs of people by living immersed with them, always there where they were, sharing simple and profound life experiences with them. We see him feasting with sinners and befriending the outcasts and those experiencing condemnation. He learned the joys of celebration: going up every year to Jerusalem, singing, playing, praying; he celebrated weddings; went to Bethany where Lazarus gave a dinner for him. He spent much time with little children: "Let them come," he said, "I love them." He watched them and engaged with them, and then could say, "This is what the kingdom is like." Jesus' preaching, too, reflected the various groups of persons with whom he was identified: farmers, wealthy city officials, fishermen, vinegrowers, prostitutes, and the rich.

Again and again, we see reflected in his preaching a movement of learning who they were and what life was like for them; then, using their language, speaking God's message.

Jesus from the Standpoint of Mercy

If we look at Jesus from the standpoint of Mercy, what do we find? Recall here the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37). The Fathers of the Church saw this parable as a symbol of Jesus who not only told the parable but lived it himself. At the end of the story when Jesus asked, "Which of these proved himself a neighbor?" the response was, literally in the Greek text, "the one who did mercy." The Good Samaritan is the one who did mercy. There is revelation here that is critical for ministry because Jesus said, "Now, you go and do likewise."

Howard Gray, S.J., identifies four movements in this parable, the four movements of ministry. They are: seeing, feeling, acting, and sustaining. One movement flows from the other. It is this four-fold movement that makes the Samaritan different from the priest and the levite. He alone did mercy; the other two did not. They were not the neighbor. The Samaritan saw, but so did the priest and the levite. What was different was that he not only saw, but he also felt deeply. He was deeply moved by the wounded man. It was a spontaneous visceral identification which was a combination of seeing and feeling. Yet, seeing and feeling is not enough, because in the Scriptures, if one only sees and feels from a distance, it becomes pity. No, the Samaritan became personally involved and probably got his hands dirty. In the Scriptures, whenever we see this feeling word "to be seized with compassion," we see along with it this spontaneous action. Something is done; and then, there is a movement of the Samaritan's presence and concern through the innkeeper to care for the wounded man while he himself moved on.

Thus, these four movements of ministry — the contemplative, the affective, the involvement, and the sustaining — were there in the person of the one who did mercy.

Definition of Mercy

These four elements of the one-who-did-mercy are not unique to the story of the Samaritan. Rather, they are characteristic of the entire biblical understanding of this complex reality we call "mercy." In both the Old and New Testaments, "doing mercy" requires: alertness to the needs around you (seeing); a heart open to being claimed by the need (feeling); the ability to act to relieve the need (involvement); and the provision for continued healing (sustaining). Mercy in this biblical sense is both affective and effective: it involves both profound tenderness and concrete active response.

In the bible, mercy is never simply awareness of suffering, nor is it just being sorry for or feeling pity toward someone. It is not simply suffering with or sharing another's pain. (The Samaritan does not leap into the ditch to just "be with" the beaten man). Mercy is never just meaning well or intending to do a good. The priest and the levite may have intended to help later. Biblical mercy is always dynamic, outward going. It moves. It springs to relieve needs. Mercy must be done, not just felt.

On the other hand, biblical mercy is never simply good works. It is not philanthropy. In order to "be merciful as God is merciful," one is compelled in the biblical accounts to act out of deeply felt compassion. Activism with no heart is not the way of the profoundly affective Holy One of Israel whose acts manifest God's consuming love, self-effacing tenderness, unquenched desire to have all people free and whole. Over and over the scriptures enjoin the faithful to be like their God; to feel with the suffering and to act to relieve their distress; to forgive rather than repay; to have a vulnerable heart.

Genuine mercy . . . must have both the affective and the effective components.

Genuine mercy, in the biblical sense then, must have both the affective and the effective components. The affective is the ability to be seized by and overcome with compassion; the effective is the ability to act immediately to comfort, to bind up. Mercy is not so much a quality as a process, a movement. Compassion becomes concrete action in response to an immediate situation of need. This is the dynamic to do mercy: to see a need, to be viscerally affected in the process of seeing, to be urged from the depths of this feeling into spontaneous action, to see the assistance through to healing and then to let go.

What makes this movement we are calling biblical mercy different from simple compassionate social action? Mercy in the Scriptures is an act of faith; as response to God. In the Old Testament, mercy is never distinct from covenant. One is merciful only because God is. The God of the covenant demands that people share with each other the mercy they have received from God. Community is born out of divine compassion and ceases to be genuine when it ceases to do mercy. In the New Testament, this covenant-God takes on flesh, suffers with people, becomes brother to those in pain. Doing mercy now means having the heart of Christ and being the hands of his healing here and now.

These Movements in Jesus

The Fathers of the early church identified Jesus as the Good Samaritan in our lives, the one who does mercy. In the Synoptics alone, there are several instances where a single Greek word is used over and over to describe this affective/effective movement in Jesus. It's a kind of gutsy word, "splanchnizomai," and it has this two-edged dynamic of being seized by something and impelled to act on it. Listen for these movements in each of these descriptions:

- To the leper who approached Jesus: "If you want to," the leper said, "you can cure me." Seized with compassion for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. "Of course I want to! Be cured!" (Mark 1:40-42)
- To the two blind men: "Deeply moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes and they could see. And they became his followers." (Mt. 20:29-34)
- To the widow at Naim: "The Lord was move with compassion upon seeing her; then, he touched the litter and said, 'Young man, get up!'" (Lk. 7:11-17)
- To the prodigalm son: "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was over- come with compassion. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. . .'we are going to have a feast, a celebration!'" (Lk. 15:11-32)

In all these events, there were others who also saw, others who surely felt sorry for the widow; others upset by the blind men; others revolted by the leper. What, then, stands out about the response of Jesus? Precisely this doing of mercy stands out, this dynamic of being affective and being effective. We now take a deeper look at these four movements of seeing, of feeling, of acting, and of sustaining in the life of Jesus.

Jesus Saw

For Jesus, sight is insight. In looking at the pages of Scripture, we can discern some of the things Jesus saw. He looked at the crowds who were exhausted and dejected and saw them as sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36-37). He said, "Look around you!" He looked at the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air and

saw his Father's extraordinary attentiveness to every detail of life (Mt. 6:35-24). He saw the woman at the well and said, "Come and see. The fields are white for the harvest." (John 4:35). He could see the children piping and perceive the relationship of the Pharisees to God (Lk. 7:31-32).

Contemplation prayer for Christ . . . bringing the reality of each day before God and getting his Father's perspective.

Jesus saw richly, contemplatively. Contemplation prayer for Christ became a matter of bringing the reality of each day before God and getting his Father's perspective. Jesus did not live two lives, one of prayer and one of ministry. He lived one human life, spent at times alone with his God, and at other times amid human need where he also saw his Father. There is this interpenetration, then, between contemplation and action: Jesus, after being baptized, was at prayer (Lk. 3:21); he would go off where he could be alone and pray (Lk. 6:12); the seventy-two came back rejoicing and Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank you . . ." (Lk. 10:17-22); Jesus took the loaves, and raising his eyes to heaven, prayed . . . (Mt. 14:19). Jesus saw richly, contemplatively, all day long; he saw significance in events. For Jesus, sight is insight. For Jesus, the Father is before him always. For Jesus, life is holy. And no need can be overlooked.

Jesus Felt

Jesus not only saw contemplatively, he felt strongly, deeply, and compassionately. Because he saw, his own heart expanded. In the biblical sense, this "to feel" is the opposite of "hearts of stone" and "closed hearts." To feel means to apprehend the other as sister or brother whose need takes hold of me, obliging me to act. Jesus was profoundly moved by human need; physical pain, dejection, a sharing of joy, harassment, exhaustion, a longing to share an experience, loneliness, grief, hunger. The Scriptures hint at the expansiveness of his affective life: Jesus wept (John 11:35); he was furious with them! (cf Mt. 24:13-39); he was filled with joy in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 10:21); Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart (John 11:34); Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him (Lk. 10:21); when Jesus saw Mary weeping, he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotions (John 11:33); you faithless generation; how long shall I put up with you! (Lk. 9:41); my heart is filled with sorrow to the point of death (Lk. 14:35); he took him in his arms, embracing him, kissing him tenderly (Lk. 15:21). These words delineate for us a heart marvelously in touch with the full range of human feelings.

Regarding Jesus' compassion, we can ask if he started with a full-blown affective life? Full-blown compassion? No, the scriptures reveal that he became that way through a lifetime of involvement in human life — with his parents, while making friends, in sharing life more intimately with two or three of them, and in allowing all kinds of persons to touch him and trigger sensitivities in him.

His experiences affected how he responded to others. For example, his own experience of being welcomed at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus made him most sensitive to welcoming others, such as Zaccheus, the children, and the outcasts. He extended a welcoming presence to all. His experience of being rejected in the synagogue ("isn't this Joseph's son? Everyone was enraged, sprang to their feet, and hustled him out of town . . . " [Lk. 4:22, 28-29]) made him exceptionally concerned for the Samaritans who could not enter the synagogue, for the lepers who could not even come into town, and for public sinners. And he knew deeply the experience of condemnation which sensitized him to others' being condemned.

So, it was his own experience of deep human feelings that opened him to greater awareness of others' feelings; and so, this two-fold dynamic of being affected is always insight and compassion. Sight and compassion sharpen one another until they almost become one: a kind of seeing-with-the-heart.

Jesus Acted

Jesus' alert and compassionate reading of a situation and his being profoundly moved impelled him to act — to do something spontaneously. Again, we see that mercy must be done, not just felt. And we ask, how did Jesus become involved? Jesus became involved not by pointing up faults, but by becoming friend to publicans and sinners. We turn to the Scriptures for two examples of how Jesus acted, of how he did mercy.

The first is the cure of two blind men in Mt. 20:29-34. The scene is obviously crowded. The disciples are there and the blind men are crying out, shouting and making a real scene. Everyone could see the need of the blind men, and it is Matthew who specifically notes the feeling responses of the crowd, their irritation and anger: "they scolded them and told them to keep quiet." In bold contrast to that, Jesus was seized with compassion, with "splanchnizomai." His seeing and his immediate visceral response, no matter what the crowds were telling him to do, impelled him to call them over and to heal them.

The second example is the feeding of the multitude in Mt. 14:14-19. Listen to this account for the movements of the seeing, the feeling, and the acting.

The disciples see the need so clearly that they bring it to the attention of Jesus: "It's a lonely place; send them away . . . so they can buy food." But Jesus' response to that same need is very different. He feels so deeply moved with compassion for them that he wants to provide for them and would like his disciples to have that same sense of providence. "You give them to eat." They protest, but beyond their objection, he takes what is available and acts. Because he feels so keenly, it is unthinkable that he would send them away. In both of these examples, Jesus alone reads the situation with compassion and therefore, cannot help but offer concrete assisting response.

Jesus Sustains

The first element of the effective response is action. The second element is that of sustaining. The biblical notion of mercy is always tied to faithfulness. The seeing, feeling and acting establishes a relationship that is ongoing; doing mercy is not a matter of a passing kindness.

Jesus gives himself; gets involved; continues relationships. He is not a hit-and-run magician, but a faithful friend.

Yet, others don't depend on Jesus' presence. He restores them to a relationship or to their health, and then he moves on. Involvement brings a claim, but not a claim of dependence. The biblical pattern reveals a call to continued faith — a proclamation of God's goodness experienced concretely and a letting go. "Go home now," we read, "and tell everyone what God in his mercy has done for you." "Go, your faith has healed you." The persons living near Jacob's well wanted Jesus to stay with them probably forever! The gospel tells us, "He stayed with them two days."

Jesus . . . fosters freedom, not dependence.

Jesus leaves behind people of faith, but he leaves. Jesus, in the gospels, fosters freedom, not dependence. His deeply felt involvement in others' lives is never the clinging kind. Jesus' involvement is empowering; it is freeing. So, sustaining involves faithfulness while relinquishing the immediacy of the contact. In our relationship to Jesus, he gives us, as the Fathers of the Church note, not to the innkeeper, but to the Holy Spirit so that we can become as involved as he was. He relinquished his own immediacy to us by giving us his spirit. "I'm not leaving you orphans."

Let us look first at these four movements of ministry in the life of Catherine McAuley, and then see what they might mean for us today.

Catherine Saw

Catherine's seeing was shaped by two powerful elements: her devotion to prayer and her immersion in Irish Society, both among the wealthy and the poorest of the poor. Catherine's own contemplation was central to her doing of mercy. In her words: " . . . if we were to neglect these means of obtaining Divine support (namely, prayer and sacramental life), we would deserve that God should stop the course of His graces, to make us sensible that all our efforts would be fruitless . . ."[2] And on the other hand, it is very clear that for her, prayer is for ministry, not withdrawal from it: "We ought therefore to make account that our perfection and merit consists in acquitting ourselves well of these duties (of mercy), so that though the spirit of prayer and retreat should be most dear to us, yet such a spirit as would never withdraw us from these works of mercy, otherwise it should be regarded as a temptation rather than the effect of sincere piety.[3]

Catherine grew more and more into this special integrated presence. In Chapter 3 of our Original Rule, she calls us to pray before our doing of mercy and after our coming back. She says specifically that when we return, we are to thank God for grace and for mercy. In her openness before God, she received God's mercy and was led to see God in each person she served. Her faith-vision was: I am serving Christ in this person. In the first chapter of our Original Rule, we read, " . . . the Sisters . . . should animate their zeal and fervor by the example of . . . Jesus . . . who has testified on all occasions a tender love for the poor, and has declared that He would consider as done to Himself whatever should be done unto them."[4]

Secondly, her seeing was seeing contemplatively in all of the situations in which she was immersed in Irish society. From her writings we read, " . . . we learn by visiting prisons and hospitals, and by reconciling quarrels, what misery there is in this world."[5] She paid attention to her surroundings; she was quick to notice need. She writes regarding Limerick, " . . . the poor here are in the most miserable state; the whole surrounding neighborhood is one scene of wretchedness and sorrow."[6]

Catherine Felt

We all know that Catherine was a very affectionate woman who felt deeply. She was moved by the distress of the poor, and it was out of this that the Congregation was founded. She lived a very free and affectionate life with her Sisters in community. These kinds of feeling responses find expression in our Original Rule. She wrote these right into the text. Relative to the sick poor, she wrote in Chapter 3 (that chapter that was specifically hers): " . . . if our hearts be not affected, in vain should we hope to affect theirs."[7] Other instances are: "Jesus Christ . . . testified on all occasions a tender love for the poor."[8]; (in taking care of the sick) "great tenderness should be

employed."[9]; ". . . revolve in mind how tenderly He cherished Holy Poverty."[10]; " . . . the Sisters . . . should have the most tender devotion to the Passion of . . . Jesus Christ."[11]; (the superior) "shall tenderly comfort and support the dejected."[12] And yet, compassion in the biblical sense was not just the feeling of tenderness, but the being impelled by it — the being summoned/claimed by a feeling which someone else's distress engenders.

Equally striking is her seemingly boundless affection for the Sisters and her remarkable freedom in its expression. Notice, for example, how she begins and ends her letters: "my darling Sister Mary Elizabeth"; "your ever most affectionate Mary Catherine"; "remember me affectionately to all, and believe me your ever fond M.C.Ca." In a letter to Sister M. Elizabeth Moore, following the news of a sister's death in St. Mary's Convent in Limerick, we read: "I did not think any event in this world could make me feel so much. I have cried heartily and implored God to comfort you. I know He will . . . my heart is sore not on my account, nor for the sweet innocent spirit that has returned to her Heavenly Father's bosom, but for you. You may be sure I will go to see you, even if it were more out of the way, and indeed, I will greatly feel the loss that will be visible on entering the Convent."[13]

(Catherine's) affection found expression in spontaneity and freedom.

Her affection found expression in spontaneity and freedom. Writing to a novice who was a good friend whom she was going to visit, we read: "I really long for the time we are to meet again. But the good mother superior will not have equal reasons to rejoice, for I am determined not to behave well, and you must join me. If I mention the day we propose going, you might contrive to put the clock out of order, though that would be almost a pity. By some means we must have till ten o'clock every night, not a moment's silence until we are asleep — not to be disturbed till we awake. Take care to have the key to the cross-door, and when those who are not so happily disposed go into choir, we can lock them in until after breakfast. I fear Sister M. Clark (her companion) will join the "Divine Mother" (local superior). She is getting rather too good for my taste."[14]

And to a superior, she chided, "You have become a dignitary and cannot give ear or time to folly!"[15]

Catherine Acted

Catherine saw contemplatively, allowing herself to be moved deeply, and this movement impelled her to act. She knew she was doing something for or to Christ. "Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has, in all ages of the Church, excited the faithful in a particular manner, to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them, they regarded the person of our Divine Master who has said: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me."[16]

This reality so dominated her spirituality that it immersed her in the Paschal Mystery. She felt privileged to serve those in need, never looking down on them, but placing herself at their feet. She always felt comfortable with them and they always felt welcome in her presence. She respected and empowered their human dignity enabling them to see themselves as whole persons.

That this seeing and being deeply moved impelled her to act, we see again and again in her life. For example, she wrote, "When we went to the convent in Kingston (where they were already established), I expressed to Rev. Mr. Sheridan a particular desire to have a school for the poor girls whom we every day saw loitering about the roads in a most neglected state; and I immediately proposed giving the coach house, stable, and part of our garden, with some gates, doors, and other materials for that purpose."[17]

Consider the beginnings of the house for distressed women. A young girl came to Coolock House asking for refuge from being alone on the streets and in extreme danger. Catherine was deeply moved to hear this and took her to a house of refuge already established in Dublin in the hope of having her received there. She learned that this charitable house was run by a committee with a certain routine to be observed before admitting anyone no matter how urgent the case. Furthermore, the committee was not meeting until the following week! The girl subsequently disappeared back into the streets. Catherine immediately decided to open a house for these women so they would never again have to wait for a committee.[18]

Catherine Sustained

Catherine manifested the sustaining covenant qualities of loyalty and faithfulness. Her response to the trials of early foundations, especially that of Charleville, whose founder tried to pressure Catherine into dissolving it, was revealed in a letter written to the foundress there: "What could excuse us before God for casting off any charge which we had freely undertaken except compelled by necessity to do so? Are not the poor of Charleville as dear to Him as elsewhere? And while one pound of Miss Clanchy's five hundred lasts, ought we not to persevere and confide in His Providence? I am grieved to find such faint-hearted symptoms amongst us!"[19]

Catherine lived her ministry of mercy with unusu-

al faithfulness and yet was ready to relinquish any work, not clinging to what was. She lived in a society as insulated from the poor as we are. Yet, she never despised the rich. She was born into their class and brought many women to a consciousness of how to move into another culture/class in the sense of "being with" them. Lay women were always associated with her and with the early foundations. In fact, many of the original foundations were possible because some of these persons were donors and associated themselves with her in her work. She lived with a tremendous freedom. She was always open, and did not cling to what was. Again, regarding distressed women admitted to the House of Mercy, we find in the Original Rule, " . . . great care (should be) taken to place them in situations for which they are adapted . . . They shall not be encouraged to remain long in the House of Mercy, as in general it will be better for them soon to enter on that state and employment by which they are to live."[20]

These Movements in Ourselves Today

We have looked at these four movements of ministry in Jesus, in Catherine McAuley, and now we look at these in ourselves today as Sisters of Mercy. At the outset, we might ask how we foster this movement of mercy inside of us that has these two components of the affective and the effective?

To See

Jesus saw richly because he saw contemplatively. Perhaps we can hear his own contemplation as an invitation to us, his followers, to live contemplatively. This invitation includes an ongoing call to change our outlook, to clear our vision, to adjust our perspective to God's mercy.

To see, requires time set aside to cherish the works of mercy (our ministry). Without this, Henri Nouwen has noted, ministry can quickly degenerate into a busy life in which our own needs for affection and acceptance start to dominate our actions. Being busy, then, becomes a way of convincing ourselves of our importance. Contemplation never ends in removal from life, but brings us back to involvement in the human situation with a vision that pervades and influences everything we do. God is to be praised for revelations in the very midst of our active ministry.

Today, our seeing involves even more. Contemplation embraces not only our brothers and sisters all over the world but the very earth itself. We now recognize that justice is a constitutive element of the gospel, that we are obliged to work toward a world where "mercy and justice shall kiss."

Seeing, then, is seeing a need, but because of at least two factors operating among us, we see differently: we all have different gifts and we have different experiences. Therefore, it seems critical for ministry that we share our vision with one another. Such sharing will certainly be critical for discernment.

To Feel

In these movements of ministry, the gospels say that seeing is not enough; it must be accompanied by this "being seized", this feeling deeply. We recall here the affectivity of Jesus and Catherine as we talk about our own.

In the light of doing mercy, we sense a dynamic urgency from the gospels to grow in our affective lives; tenderness and compassion are rooted in one's affectivity. It is evident in Jesus and in Catherine. The Incarnation is an affirmation of our embodiment. If we deny our affectivity, we lessen or make impossible the doing of mercy: the living with such openness to life wherever we find it that we allow ourselves literally to be seized by another's need and to respond in a manifestation of tenderness. Without this affective component, our work will be only work, but not necessarily mercy. Even our being together is not mercy without this affective dimension, an affectivity that is hospitable and outward-centered.

We grow in the expansiveness of our affectivity, as did Jesus, by involvement in all different types of human situations, by being with people where they are. Living fully our emotional and affective life becomes one of the ways we read the signs of the times. Our growth in affectivity can be facilitated, too, through art, music, drama, dancing, sustaining friendships, poetry, and leisure. It seems important to see these not just as time set apart, like a vacation, but as dimensions of how we live and minister each day. If these are integrated as part of our approach to daily life, it could make the difference between the pelagian busy strivings of the workaholic and the dynamic presence of the woman who lives mercy.

Regular reflection and interpretation of our inner affective experiences (both positive and negative) from the vantage point of faith and God's loving care for us, help us come to a growing stability of an affective, contemplative presence in all our doing of mercy.

To Act

We noted that in the Scriptures mercy is never simply an awareness of need. Neither is it just being sorry for or feeling pity toward someone. It is always dynamic and outgoing: feeding, clothing, welcoming, being hospitable, giving drink, mourning with, burying, admonishing, educating, forgiving, bearing wrongs, comforting, praying, counseling. Mercy, then, is about doing. It is an understanding that I am the solution; that I have gifts and talents that others do not. By gifting us, God commissions us to specific ministries. The gifting is in itself a call. Hence, our doing of mercy is going to find expression in a variety of ways. It seems critical not only that we live our gifts but that we create a climate where the gifts and

creativity of each of us can be welcomed and fostered. It is Elizabeth O'Connor who writes, "our unused gifts cry out to be used; they are disturbers of our sleep."[21]

Willingness to risk actions prompted by these inner gifts is the wellspring of new ministries and breakthroughs in the church. Once we have seen contemplatively and allowed ourselves to be deeply moved by a need, then mercy can become justice.

And what about our life together? From a single chapter in our Original Rule, we know what it is that should eminently characterize us, namely, union and charity. We were founded and grounded on that. Being merciful toward one another and receiving mercy makes us one with the other. If I see, allow myself to be moved, and take into myself that need of the other, or allow another to receive mine, I am united with that person. There is communion. And we are asked to maintain and cherish this so perfectly among ourselves that there is in us one heart.

. . . our doing of mercy will energize us, not exhaust us.

Furthermore, our doing of mercy will energize us, not exhaust us. When Jesus sent the disciples out, they came back rejoicing! "The blind see, the lame walk; we even cast out demons in your name." (Lk. 10) The seventy-two came back rejoicing! Doing mercy energizes.

Mercy is possible in any situation. But it should be clear that we cannot simply equate it with good. No ministry is automatically an act of mercy; but within any ministry, the doing of mercy is possible, that affective seeing and being seized by, and that effective doing and sustaining. And for us as Sisters of Mercy, any "job" is worthwhile and even precious if within it we are doing mercy and that doing of mercy will energize us no matter how exhausting our other tasks. If we really got to the heart of our charism, we'd be fully alive.

We Sustain

That brings us to the fourth element of doing mercy, sustaining. The compassion stirred in Jesus by the crowd leads him to involve his disciples in his ministry. Sometimes this involvement followed Jesus' own immediate response of curing or teaching; sometimes it sprang immediately from Jesus' own concern for the crowd. "At the sight of the crowd, his heart was moved with compassion." Then, the summoning and commissioning of the twelve immediately follows. The needs of the crowds are both spiritual and material and cry out for pastoral response. Jesus himself involves others. He trusts them.

In reflecting on our own experiences, we know we have lived that covenant quality of faithfulness: we have brought persons to faith; we have taught; we have cured. We have sustained these through ongoing care, availability and fidelity in friendships. But besides faithfulness, real ministry, real mercy, means letting go. Relinquishing is part of doing mercy. The Samaritan said to the innkeeper, "You take care of him." The focus is, after all, on the person who has the need, not on my need to remain.

In our doing of mercy, we involve others in our ministry, and often we hand on to them the work we have begun. We relinquish, as did Jesus, as did Catherine, our own direct ministry, needs which we feel keenly and in which we are deeply involved. What is being sustained is the other person's growth toward wholeness, and it is this wholeness of the person that is important.

Conclusion

In our doing of mercy, then, God invites us to see contemplatively, to feel with deep affection, to act concretely and spontaneously, and to sustain, faithfully, but with a tremendous readiness to relinquish. Reflection on these questions may lead us to new understandings of our mercy charism: What are we seeing as the crying needs? What is seizing us affectively that we feel impelled to do something about? What kind of actions energize others? In what kinds of actions are we energized? How do we live that element of sustaining which clearly includes freedom to move on as did Jesus and Catherine? In our doing of mercy, we will be revealing the God of mercy, as did Jesus, as did Catherine McAuley. Imagine the privilege that is ours to reveal the mercy of God, this God "Whose tender mercies are over all God's works."

Footnotes

1. *Original Rule* (confirmed, 6 June 1841) (Dublin: Archives of the Convent of Mercy), Part I, Chapter 3.

2. "Spirit of the Institute", in *Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1837-1841*, edited by Sr. M. Angela Bolster, R.S.M. (Cork and Ross, Ireland: Sisters of Mercy, 1989), p. 242.

3. Ibid., p. 245.

4. *Original Rule*, I, Chap. 1.

5. "Spirit of the Institute", p. 244.

6. Letter to Sr. M. Francis Howard, written from Limerick, 17 November 1838. *Correspondence*, p. 73.

7. *Original Rule*, I, Chap. 3

8. Ibid., I, Chap. 1.

9. Ibid., I, Chap. 3.

10. Ibid., I, Chap. 5.

11. Ibid., I, Chap. 12.

12. Ibid., II, Chap. 3.

13. *Correspondence*, 21 March 1840, p. 126. See also letter to Sr. M. Francis Howard, 17 February 1838, p. 53.

14. Letter to Sr. Mary Delamer, novice at Tullamore, 2 July 1836. *Correspondence*, p. 20.

15. To Sr. M. Cecilia Marmion, Barr, 22 March 1841. *Correspondence*, p. 210.

16. *Original Rule*, I, Chap. 3.

17. To Charles Cavanagh, Esq., 20 June 1837. *Correspondence*, p. 26.

18. 1863 Memoir of Sr. M. Monica O'Doherty (a novice in Dublin in 1841) illuminated ms. p. 27-32. Also see Sr. M. Bertrand Degnan, R.S.M., *Mercy Unto Thousands* (Westminster, Md., Newman Press, 1957), pp. 37-38.

19. To Sr. M. Angela Dunne, Charleville, 20 December 1837, *Correspondence*, p. 44.

20. Original Rule, I, Chap. 4.

21. Elizabeth O'Connor, *Eighth Day of Creation*, (Waco, Texas: Work Books, 1971), p. 18.

What is MAST?

• What is MAST?

MAST is the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology.

• Can I belong?

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

• When does MAST meet?

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

• When and where is the meeting this year?

This year MAST will hold its annual meeting at Carlon College in Pittsburgh, PA from Monday evening June 8, 1992, to noon Thursday, June 11.

• Are there dues?

Yes, membership dues are $25 per year, payable to Janet Ruffing, MAST treasurer, 2043 Hone Avenue, Bronx, NY, 10461. This includes a journal subscription.

• What goes on at these meetings?

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

• How do I get on the mailing list?

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

• How do I register for the June, 1992 meeting?

Write:
Maureen Crossan, RSM
MAST '92 Meeting
6325 Glenview Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15206

Contemporary Challenges of Our Charism

Mary Daly, R.S.M.

In her life, her ministry, her writings and in the Institute she founded, Catherine McAuley expressed a profound insight into the mystery of the presence of God to the world in which she lived. At her death she bequeathed her legacy to her followers. This legacy at once animates and challenges those who seek to live in fidelity to her spirit.

Catherine's life shows the spirit which animated her. Her ministry as a young woman caring for the poor, sick and ignorant in the environs of Coolock House, in the parish of St. Mary's in Dublin, blossomed in the opening of the House of Mercy on Baggot Street and in the gathering of other women to join her in her work. In her endeavors she showed herself to be a woman of compassion and common sense with a down to earth spirit that connected her both with those she served and the co-workers who joined her. Her writings reflect this same sense; her concern to relieve misery, her bondedness in solidarity, her own need for mercy, the interrelation of prayer and action, her view of authority as service.

This mystery of Incarnation stood at the heart of Catherine's life and spirituality.

This spirit animating Catherine seems to flow from her understanding of the Incarnation, that is, from her sense of God present and living among the people of her time. According to Joanna Regan, "Jesus was the center and passionate love of her life."[1] His concerns are hers; his way, her way. Jesus saw his contemporaries as his brothers and sisters, all children of his Father. So also Catherine saw the poor and suffering as the "most dear children of their heavenly Father."[2] She knew that whatever was done to the least was done to Christ.

This mystery of Incarnation stood at the heart of Catherine's life and spirituality. It is the mystery that enabled her to confide securely in the providence of the God whom she trusted as Father. It was the mystery that enabled her to see Christ in herself and in her poor and so respond to him out of her passionate love. Catherine bore this Christ in her heart; she saw him in the poor; she wrote him in her life and in the Institute. As her followers it is our task to wrestle with her vision and to continue in this age to write it in our lives.

Catherine's Heritage Challenges Her Followers

The first challenge of Catherine's heritage is the challenge to contemplation. Because Catherine bore Christ in her heart, she recognized him in his suffering members and delighted in his gift of her sisters. She prized and trusted deeply the gift of humanity. In a letter to Mary Ann Doyle she reminds her that we bestow on others not our gifts but ourselves.[3] Catherine's vision in prayer rests on her faith in the presence of Christ to her moment of history. Contemplating Christ in prayer she sees growth in the spiritual life express itself in faith-filled service to suffering human beings.

So also for us. We are challenged to examine and evaluate our lives. For our lives reveal to us and to others the faith by which we live. Do our lives separately and as an Institute witness the values of Christ? A consumer society can make subtle erosions on the value of being a human person. Does our contemplation of the Gospel bring us conversion from society's values to those of Christ? Does it critique our lives making us aware of our compromises with the unchristian, alienating, and depersonalizing tendencies in our culture, both religious and civic? Does it show us the poor ones in whom Christ suffers?

Catherine's prayer was not ethereal, removed. In the Bermondsey Manuscript[4] she cautions us that the prayer of the Sister of Mercy is shaped by ministry. Catherine both followed Christ and found Christ in serving the poor and suffering. Her small treatise, "The Spirit of the Institute," expressed her conviction that the Sisters of Mercy attain their salvation, that is, they receive the grace of Christ and are conformed to him, in and through their service to others. "We may then truly say to these poor objects of our care what Saint Paul said to the Philippians and Thessalonians, 'You are my joy and my crown because through you we draw down on ourselves the mercy and grace of our Lord.'"[5]

As she notes in that treatise, the two threads of service to others and attaining one's own sanctity are intertwined in a mutual relationship. One advances in sanctity through service to others. The document stresses how important it is to grow in virtue and in prayer. But the reason for doing this is that in this way one may serve others better.

Catherine did not advocate the doing of good works as the overflow of a life in union with God. Rather the very doing of the works of mercy unites us to God and fits us for service. She says "the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which draw religious from a life of contemplation, so far from separating them from the love of God, unite them much more closely to Him, and render them more valuable in His

holy service."[6] The constant interchange of prayer and service nourish one another.

Through a contemplative presence to others, Catherine knows a God present to the world and especially to the needy. In her adaptation of the text of Alonso Rodriguez she softens his language regarding keeping oneself "separated from the world."[7] The Sister of Mercy serving the needy will find in the world the God who called her. And so Catherine, simplifying Rodriguez's text, makes bold to say "that though the spirit of prayer and retreat should be most dear to us, yet such a spirit as would never withdraw us from these works of mercy, otherwise it should be regarded as a temptation rather than the effect of sincere piety."[8]

One sentence from this treatise may summarize Catherine's spirituality: "the King of Kings takes care that those who attend to the care of His most dear poor, to whom He is Father, shall be nourished and animated with the choicest food from His heavenly table, that they may the better fulfill an office so dear to His Paternal heart."[9] Here we find her trust in the Father's provident care of both the poor and those who come together in the Institute to serve them.

. . . ministry brings us and the ones we serve a deeper conformity to Christ.

For Catherine, Christ is not an historical figure who serves as example and model for herself and her congregation. "Rather, Christ is a present reality who moves within her, impelling her, calling to her from his suffering members. He is incarnate in Dublin, Limerick, Booterstown, Kingstown, Carlow and Cork. Often in ministry one can be intent upon the outcomes, the achievements and accomplishments of one's service to the poor and afflicted. An attitude of Christian contemplation will perceive the action of Christ present to both minister and one served and strengthen the minister to respond as Christ."[10] The contemplative person will be able to recognize how Christ calls *her* to be saved in and through this act of service to another. It may be through the experience of fidelity in face of opposition, of humility in the presence of failure. It may take many shapes but always, ministry brings us and the ones we serve a deeper conformity to Christ.

A spirit of contemplation will also illumine the recesses of our hearts enabling and strengthening us to face our own deficiencies and limitations. In a poignant letter to Frances Warde, Catherine acknowledges her own limitations in facing the chaplaincy controversy. "Pray fervently to God to take all bitterness from me. I can scarcely think of what has been done to me without resentment. May God forgive me and make me humble before He calls me into His presence."[11] It is in facing ourselves that we know our own need for Mercy and are converted from being benevolent benefactors to becoming sisters of mercy in union with those who suffer. Without a sense of our own need for mercy our ministry may well be characterized by a condescension engendered by attitudes of superiority. Awareness of a common humanity bonded Catherine in union and charity to her sisters and to those she served.

Catherine's Heritage is a Challenge to the Passion

Since Vatican II we, like Catherine, have done a great deal of reflection on the mission of Jesus. The words of the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel have echoed many times in our liturgies and assemblies. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me: therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord."

We took those to heart and struggled hard over them. They caused us no small amount of pain as we attempted to place ourselves in ministry to the materially poor and yet recognize the validity of many, indeed most, of our traditional ministries. The decades of the 60's and 70's witnessed this struggle. Now we begin to see some of the fruits of those years. In both old established ministries and in newer forms of ministry we seek to serve the poor. One senses across the Mercy world that the cry of the poor has found a response from many Mercy hearts. We feel we are in some measure walking with Christ's poor.

However, this God of ours has strange ways and never allows us to get comfortable! It was Christ's love for the poor, the marginated of his time that brought him conflict, loss of reputation, attention from religious and civil authority and finally, death. Because Christ placed the human person above law and religious practice he came into direct conflict with the religious people of his day. He met conflict and opposition from those he served, from religious leaders, from his own family. We will not fare any better. As we continue this following of Christ, this conformity to Christ, this vision of Incarnation, there is only one logical outcome. It will lead us also to the experience of conflict, loss of reputation, attention from religious and civic authority and finally our passion and death in some form. How could it possibly be otherwise? And yet, how do we enter this moment?

Once more, with Catherine, we are sent to contemplate Jesus in his mission and ministry to others. Conflict can come from many sources. In itself it does not validate that in our mission we are being conformed to Christ. We must consider whether our ministry is the work of Jesus, done in the manner of Jesus.

Is it the Cross of Christ we bear or one of our own making? Catherine recognized the Cross as that of Christ by reason of the values inherent in it and the virtue emanating from it.[12] Are the values which characterize our manner of ministering the values of the Gospel or the economic, manipulative, dominating, militaristic values of a dehumanizing culture? If we do not bring our experiences of conflict, rejection and opposition to prayer, we may never be able to discern our own unchristian values. For conflict in itself is not a value; nor is its avoidance a virtue. As Catherine noted regarding suffering, conflict seems to be a fact of life.[13] When fidelity to our charism and to Jesus bring conflict into our lives, we must seek to bring to it, as did Catherine, the values of Christ; a patience, a love and respect that helps us to meet those in the conflict as did Christ, to listen, to be open, to be faithful. How difficult it is, in such times, not to be made defensive and unchristian by our own fears. How difficult it is to be faithful and not run away from the experience of conflict! Is this not our own experience of the Agony in the Garden? Let this cup pass, yet Thy will be done.

The challenge to us is to find Mercy in and through the crosses of conflict which we meet.

Catherine would have us stand fast with the Cross of Christ, a Cross of Mercy, not anger. One profound perception of hers is that God, she knows, does not get angry with her. Suffering comes to her indeed, but the sufferings are the crosses of Christ and not those of wrath. She writes, for example, in January of 1838, to Frances Warde regarding the troubles arising from the chaplaincy controversy, "We have just now indeed more than an ordinary portion of the Cross in this one particular, but may it not be the Cross of Christ which we so often pray to 'be about us'? It has not the mark of any angry Cross, there is no disunion, no gloomy depression of spirits, no departure from charity proceeding from it." Then referring to the troubles over the foundation in Kingstown she adds, "There also we find a nice little Cross. Law proceedings for building the school . . . . Now you have the double cross, the cross of the diocese — out of it all is consoling and animating thanks be to God."[14] Catherine's perception enabled her to enter suffering precisely to find and release mercy rather than succumb beneath the punishing wrath of an angry God. She knew each foundation would have its own sufferings and that in this way and perhaps because of these, the foundation would prosper.[15] With such an insight, Catherine could not only face the difficult situations she encountered but also was able to encourage others to bear the inevitable crosses of life.[16]

In the suffering and afflictions that came her way, Catherine knew God as a Mystery larger than her comprehension. But God was a Mystery who loved her rather than one who terrified her. In her letters she speaks often of a comforting God, one who supports in afflictions, one who blesses.[17] Catherine knew suffering, physical pain, the deaths of family members and close associates, the struggles over foundations and chaplaincy services. In her faith, she joined her sufferings to those of Christ. All things came to her from her God and in them she accepted God's blessing and care for herself, for the Institute, for the poor. Joining Jesus in his passion she learns a profound trust in the one whom he called Father. God is the loving source of her life and to that loving God she commits herself to the full extent of her capabilities. She is able to write, "Bless and love the fatherly Hand which has hurt you."[18] The challenge to us is to find Mercy in and through the crosses of conflict which we meet.

Ever a practical woman, Catherine consented to begin a religious Institute to continue beyond her lifetime the vision she bore in her heart. The gifts she passed on to the Institute are well described by Mary Sullivan, R.S.M.:

- an instinct for the supreme blessing of unity, upon and among ourselves and all men and women;
- a conviction that charity and love are where God is, and a desire not to let the sun go down on the absence of it;
- a special tenderness in comforting the sick and dying and a vivid attachment to Jesus Christ Crucified that spill over into wider compassion and sympathy for all those in need;
- a strong, deep memory of God's Mercy to us that urges us daily to truer, fuller mercifulness toward others; and
- a certain joyfulness of spirit that can only come from God, whether through our inadequacies or our small virtues.[19]

The changes she made from the prevailing forms of religious life of her day helped to structure her founding vision. The lack of cloister, the going out in service, the absence of any harsh, dehumanizing ascetical practices, the prizing of the variety of gifts and personalities of the early members, the practice of authority and obedience with reverence for each person involved, simple and joyful recreation, the support of new foundations and encouragement for old ones, her lively letters, all bear witness to Catherine's love and reverence for the Incarnate God, the gift of humanity that had been found suitable as the dwelling place of God. Her perception seems to be that in the sisters' dwelling together in unity, joy, simplicity and service, God's visitation is experienced. Is it not her

love of God Incarnate that leads her to prize what is deeply human?[20]

And so the third challenge arises from Catherine's gift to the Institute of charity. It is the challenge of union and charity.

Conflict implies differences. We expect to meet differences and conflict in our lives but we usually look outside of ourselves for the partner in conflict. We do not like to be in conflict with the Church or with our own congregation. We do not like conflict within ourselves. Yet such conflicts are often our experience. Herein lies the challenge. How does an Institute whose charism is expressed in union and charity sustain conflict and differences? What is the gift of such an Institute to the Church? We more readily understand the gift of our charism of service, but how do we give this gift of the charism of union and charity?

May not the gift be ourselves, in our willingness to continue to walk together, struggling with the variety of conflicts and differences among us. We rejoice together and enjoy each other's company in our Mercy celebrations. We resonate with the line Catherine penned across the top of one of her letters, "Dance every evening."[21] Let us take possession of this spirit as expressive of a deeper unity in Christ, as more than the ephemeral spirit of good times on an untroubled day. Can we stand together in commitment to one another when our differences surface; when conflicts emerge among us? Will you throw in your lot with me? Can I accept and wrestle with your view of Mercy, of Church, indeed of Christ and of God? As we begin to live out the new union of our government structures does our commitment to Mercy and our willingness to struggle with Christ's presence among us unite us? For this is the deeper and truer union that must precede that of governance. Is this our passion, to absorb the pain and suffering of our common struggle to be mercy, to bring the compassion of Christ to the present world, to be this mercy and compassion in places where it brings us opposition and rejection?

As Sisters of Mercy we suffer pain:

- in Mercy struggles over conflicting views of our relationship with the Church,
- in the tension and struggle over the nature of religious life, tensions that can bring us into conflict with each other, our own members, with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, and with bishops as we seek to articulate our mission, our constitutions, respond to canon law, form the new Institute, all in fidelity to our charism and to a deep sense of Church,
- in the tensions and struggle to live in the Institute dying to our old structure, both union and independent, so that the new may spring forth, letting the many culture of our members widen and enrich our world vision,
- in the tensions and struggle of our ministry for women, for the unborn, for the suffering and oppressed poor of our cities and rural areas, for peace, for a nuclear free environment.

Whilst we may agree on our goal of service to the poor, sick and ignorant, we do not always agree on the direction or the means to implement this goal.

The gift of our charism is that we give to each other, to the Church and to the world the continuing struggle of dialogue and the unceasing contemplation of Christ among us. In this kind of struggle we will find the purifying presence of Christ shaping us and conforming us to himself.

Our union and charity founded on our faith in the Incarnation will call us and enable us to stand together in our differences; to be willing to be associated with and to be sister to each other; to take up the struggles of each other; to stand with members who are symbols of the conflict.

(Catherine) bore Christ in her heart, served him in God's poor . . .

Can we have that union and charity as an Institute that will sustain the tension of our differences and release the creative spirit of God? For it is always in his passion and dying that Jesus sends the Spirit upon the Church. Thus we offer our passion to each other and to the Church as gift, and so we must prayerfully and humbly seek that it be the passion of Christ. It is in this struggle, in the Institute and in the Church that both Institute and Church can find new life.

Catherine McAuley was not a theoretician. She bore Christ in her heart, served him in God's poor, wrote him so to speak, in us, the Institute she founded. She believed in his presence among the members, and in the suffering poor. She had an instinctive sense of the value and potential for transcendence in the human person. She was aware of the dynamic presence of God in the events of her life. This drew her to a deep trust in Divine Providence.

The vexing problems of personalities and finances that brought about the closing of the house in Kingstown were to her the Cross sent by God who would continue to care for his dear poor without her sisters. Her trust in Divine Providence let her shake the dust off her feet and move on. The faith in God demanded of her was not theoretical but practical, seen in her everyday life. Her vision, her Christ was written on life. To read it we must do as we do with braille, reach out, put our hands on life and know the shape of God.

Catherine's trust in Divine Providence and her grateful appreciation for God's Mercy in her life

bespeak a perception of God as Mystery that loved her, that enabled her to be free within herself and in regard to the people and events of her life.

Thomas Merton, in *Contemplative Prayer* speaks of the hell of Mercy, an expression from a twelfth century mystic. The phrase expresses that inner dread that we experience when we realize "we cannot any longer hope in ourselves, in our wisdom, our virtues, our fidelity. We see too clearly that all that is 'ours' is nothing and completely fails us. In other words we no longer rely on what we 'have', on what has been given us by our past, what we have acquired. We are open to God and to God's mercy in the inscrutable future and our trust is entirely in the emptiness where we will confront unforeseen decisions. Only when we have descended in dread to the center of our nothingness, by [God's] grace and [God's] guidance, can we be led by [God], in [God's] time, to find [God] in losing ourselves."[22]

Through the sufferings and afflictions involved in following her call to Mercy, Catherine had learned to rely on the merciful and loving Father of her Lord Jesus Christ rather than on her own power and strength. Catherine knew this hell of mercy and found there this merciful and loving God.

As followers of Christ, and daughters of Catherine McAuley, as a religious Institute and as servants of the poor, we will be led on the same path. This is our joy, our union and bondedness, our future and, indeed, our very salvation.

Footnotes

1. Joanna Regan, RSM, *Tender Courage* (Gwynedd Valley, PA: Gwynedd-Mercy College, 1978), p. 14.

2. *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, ed. by Mary Ignatia Neumann, RSM, (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1969), p. 388.

3. *Letters*, p. 325.

4. Mary C. Sullivan, "Catherine McAuley's Theological and Literary Debt to Alonso Rodriguez: The 'Spirit of the Institute' Parallels" *Recusant History*, 20, (May 1990); pp. 81-105.

5. *Letters*, p. 389.

6. *Letters*, p. 387.

7. Sullivan, p. 95f.

8. *Letters*, p. 389.

9. *Letters*, p. 389.

10. *Letters*, p. 273.

11. *Letters*, p. 127.

12. *Letters*, p. 115.

13. *Letters*, p. 100.

14. *Letters*, p. 115-116.

15. *Letters*, p. 352.

16. See her letter to M. Teresa White, *Letters*, p. 100, and to Frances Warde, p. 341.

17. *Letters*, p. 203.

18. *Letters*, p. 204 and p. 100.

19. Sullivan, "To Relieve Misery and Address its Causes: The Mission of Sisters of Mercy in Higher Education." *Proceedings of Mercy Higher Education Colloquium* (June, 1987).

20. *Letters*, p. 330.

21. *Letters*, p. 293.

22. Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 126f.

Animated by the Gospel *and Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor, we, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources for the next four years to act in solidarity with*

The economically poor of the world, especially women and children

Women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society

One another as we embrace our multi-cultural and international reality.

This commitment *will impel us to develop and act from a multi-cultural, international perspective; speak with a corporate voice; work for systemic change; and call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries.*

Direction Statement
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Americas
Founded July 20, 1991

Catherine's Spirituality of the Cross

Janet Ruffing, RSM

The intractable fact of suffering in our world and the consequences of Christian discipleship require us as Christians and as Sisters of Mercy to reappropriate in a healthy way an energizing and hopeful spirituality of the cross. Feminist criticism of a mystique of suffering and our own assumptions that all suffering is to be avoided or overcome could deprive us of a necessary resource in Christian spirituality and in our mercy heritage. Catherine McAuley's experiences led her to develop a profound spirituality of the cross. This focus on the cross of Christ was integral to her experience of God as mercy and integral to her call to embody that same mercy in her world.

I first examine elements in Catherine's spirituality of the cross through the lens of Segundo Galilea's liberation theology to provide a new way of understanding the cross. I then suggest the questions we need to confront in order to develop a spirituality of the cross for today which avoids the negative pitfalls of the ones which most of us have rejected. This renewed spirituality of the cross can provide us with the spiritual resources we need to sustain the works of mercy in both our first world and third world contexts.

An Earlier Spirituality of the Cross

To our late twentieth century ears, the language and assumptions of nineteenth-century piety, exemplified by the Devotion to the Passion of Christ, Devotion to the Sacred Heart and Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament may seem privatized, morose, or life-diminishing. This piety grew out of helplessness in the face of overwhelming suffering from illness, the omnipresence of death, the dehumanization of the very poor, and grindingly unjust social conditions.

From the late medieval period through the first half of this century, much popular piety has focused on the image of the suffering body of Jesus. First, painting and sculpture began to portray scenes from the passion such as the agony in the garden, the whipping, and the crowning with thorns. Francis of Assisi exemplified this trend when he initiated the Stations of the Cross as a popular devotion. Second, representations of the cross graphically emphasized the dead body, which had been avoided in earlier depictions of the triumphant cross. Third, a new image appeared, the Pieta — an archetype of female grief, a widow holding her only son's dead body.[1]

This piety expresses a profound sense of identification with Jesus in and through suffering. In Jesus, God's awareness of our brokenness and hardship and God's solidarity with suffering men and women are manifested. Gradually, this emphasis on how much Jesus suffered for us, and how we enter into relationship with Jesus through suffering and conflict became detached from the concrete circumstances of Jesus' own mission and ministry and the reasons why he suffered death as a criminal. This strand of piety focused instead on the virtues Jesus demonstrated in response to insult, persecution, and physical pain. Suffering, in a certain way, took on a salvific meaning in itself. Merely by suffering uncomplainingly, one could become holy and participate in a sacrificial love for others. The virtues cultivated were humility, patience, silence, obedience, and imperturbability. In order to participate in this mystique of suffering, one actively sought or welcomed opportunities to suffer.

. . . we can experience peace and joy in the midst of pain.

What are the benefits of a spirituality of the cross of this kind? First, all suffering is endowed with profound meaning. By uniting our suffering with the suffering of Christ, we can achieve forgiveness for our sins and win grace and blessing for others, both living and dead. Suffering becomes service in behalf of the neighbor.

Secondly, we discover a stance to take toward personal suffering. We become willing to embrace it and allow it to transform us into other Christs by our imitation of his virtues. By concentrating on Jesus in his humanity, we enter into a profound communion with Jesus that can be intimate, loving, and life-giving in the midst of hardship and death. We discover that we can experience peace and joy in the midst of pain. Those who suffer most from unjust social conditions can find religious meaning in their lot in life. Women may feel particularly identified with the physicality of Jesus's suffering because it resembled their pain and the frequent threat to their lives in childbirth, lactation, nurturing, care-taking, and sexual violence. Ordinary experience became religiously significant by the attitude one took toward it.[2]

Finally, the veil between this world and the next becomes transparent; hope for eternal life helps us endure the present hardship. Heaven is infinitely better than "this miserable world" or "this vale of tears". We can endure our limitations or powerlessness in the face of present suffering, including the loss of children, parents, spouse, or companions in community because we will all be reunited in heaven. To cling to a present relationship is to prevent the beloved's passage into a better life.

There were, however, some dangers in this form of piety. Some spiritualities of the cross resulted in submission to the status quo in church and society. The poor or oppressed were told to imitate Jesus in his humility and obedience rather than resist or revolt. The privileged benefitted from this piety of passivity because it rendered the poor more pliable to their exploiters.[3]

There was also great potential for deforming the divine image into a cruel or sadistic father who could be satisfied only by the agonizing death of his son. Such a God could become angry and vindictive, ready to punish or crush the non-repentant sinner. This spirituality can so erode self-esteem that people feel perpetually guilty and easily coerced into compliance by authority. This criticism of spiritualities of the cross has become familiar in our time, especially in liberation and feminist theologies. Finally, the creation itself, "this dear sweet world," could be so devalued that people felt little incentive to improve the quality of present life, to prevent or relieve suffering, or even to appreciate the good gifts of the creator God in natural beauty and relationships.[4]

A Liberation Spirituality of the Cross

Segundo Galilea identifies three aspects of an authentic spirituality of the cross. (1) "We are limited and vulnerable; illness, frustration, suffering, and death are integral parts of our life." To place this experience in the context of our following of Jesus opens us to a release of spirit within us. In Christian faith, suffering and death do not have the last word, but are ultimately overcome in the mystery of God's mercy which meets us in Christ. (2) "The cross is the price and path of conversion. Because we are immersed in egoism and the tendency toward sin, the path of conversion to the following of Jesus is a path of repentance for sin and resistance against our own particular form of egoism."[5] (3) "The cross as suffering and contradiction, as persecution and even death, is a result of faithful commitment to Jesus and his Gospel of the Kingdom." This is the fullest meaning of participation in the paschal mystery because this is the primary form of Jesus' own suffering witness. Although martyrdom is its highest expression, "it includes fidelity to the Spirit in times of conflict."[6]

Application to Catherine

Although Catherine's piety necessarily had many elements of the old piety, I propose we explore her writings in the light of these liberation themes. The first two are most characteristic of Catherine's spirituality. The third appears only in an implicit way.

Catherine was only too familiar with the suffering which is part of every human life. Catherine's early life was characterized by an alternation of scarcity and plenty, antagonism and harmony, insecurity and security. Although born into a comfortable family, her father's premature death, and her mother's inability to manage the family finances and her subsequently difficult death left Catherine and her siblings orphans in their teens.

Financial difficulties again required her to move from the more congenial Conway home to the economically comfortable but religiously hostile Armstrong household. From there she moved to the Callaghans who loved and respected her. They offered her a genuinely familial environment, religious tolerance, and eventually left her their fortune.

(Catherine's) experience taught her that although suffering is part of . . . life, it is often reversed in sudden and unexpected ways.

Catherine's formative experience was thus one of an alternation of difficulty and comfort which always somehow turned out all right. She learned to cope with this unpredictability in her experience by reliance on prayer, especially The Jesus Psalter. She read and meditated on the Scriptures and imitated the virtues of the suffering Christ proposed in the Devotion to the Sacred Heart. Catherine was so discrete about her inner life that we can only assume that this early hardship and bereavement deepened her intimacy with Christ. Her experience taught her that although suffering is part of every human life, it is often reversed in sudden and unexpected ways.

Even as her Devotion to the Passion gave meaning and significance to her suffering, she also grew to trust this Mystery which somehow encompassed her and cared for her in a most fundamental way. Her trust in providence was as strong as her attraction to the suffering Christ. And she discerned a loving and compassionate God in and through the events of her life.[7]

From her own relative security, she responded to the misery she encountered with the compassion that welled up in her from Christ. Neither Jesus nor his Father wanted such suffering; but they were both intimately present to those who suffered. Catherine discovered that "mere suffering through and for others does not have the power to separate us from God (Rom. 8:35-39). So that one can even know joy in suffering (Col. 1:24, Rom 5:2-5) . . . ."[8]

Her experience seemed to have taught her to place her trust more deeply in God's providential care for her than in her own plans. She developed in this way a genuine detachment, a certain equilibrium, that this alternation of circumstances could not disturb.

I have wondered whether Catherine felt so much

compassion for poor young women in part because she herself had felt real insecurity after her mother's death. She, too, might have been threatened in the same ways as these women she befriended.

Catherine's compassionate response to the poor was deeply personal. As Mrs. Callaghan's proxy, Catherine was specifically charged with looking after the needs of the cottagers attached to the estate. This was a gender-specific role in the nineteenth century performed by the lady of the house. Catherine welcomed this task since she shared the Catholicism of the cottagers and could take care of their medical and material needs free of an anti-Catholic attitude. Two incidents from this period of her life appear to have been the catalyst for her commitment to a life of mercy with a particular concern for women.

As the Cork manuscript tells the story, a lady's maid with a respectable family in the village of Coolock sought Catherine's advice about how to resist the sexual advances of the employer's son. Catherine advised the girl to resign her position and offered her financial support. But the young man would not be so easily deterred and indicated he would force himself on the girl. Catherine tried to place the girl in a house of refuge in Dublin to remove her physically from this threat. Catherine discovered that admissions were made by a committee that only met every two weeks; and even though Catherine pleaded the girl's case in person, she was unable to secure a place. This frustrating experience of a charitable bureaucracy that was unresponsive to the actual needs of poor women drove Catherine to initiate the house of mercy which could respond immediately.[9]

Catherine's inability to help the girl seems to have haunted her to such a degree that it became a repeating theme in her dreams — almost a nightmare which finally resolved itself when she began to plan the house of mercy to address the particular needs of working class women. The Derry Manuscript portrays these dream scenes:

> *Night after night she would see herself in some very large place where a number of young women were employed as laundresses or at plain work, while she herself would be surrounded by a crowd of ragged children whom she was washing and dressing very busily. At another time, she would see herself surrounded by a band of destitute outcast females, some abandoned by their parents, some deserted by their friends, some deprived of their natural protectors, some flying with horror from the proposals of their libertine seducers. Alarmed and amazed at the wild revellings of her imagination, she often started from her slumbers and burst into tears.*[10]

As Catherine allowed herself to see and feel the lives of poor women and children, she came to discover the mission which Jesus was entrusting to her. In her meditation on the Gospels, she singled out Jesus' love for the poor and the sick as the quality which encompasses all others. She consistently encountered her God in the poor: "What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me." She resolved to serve Christ in the poor and embody Christ in her works of mercy, resisting injustice and relieving misery with whatever means she had.

Catherine accomplished this only in union with Jesus. Although she often altered the actual situations of some people, she remained helpless in the face of illness and death. Unlike our own times, in which medical technology can often prolong life and alleviate pain for at least many people, nineteenth-century Ireland was a world in which illness and death was a fact of life. One's only choice was how one died — in great anxiety, pain, and resistance or in peaceful resignation, comforted by loving care. Catherine and the sisters had remarkable success as nurses: but they died young just as the people they cared for did.

Hope for eternal life helps a person be less overwhelmed by helplessness and less likely to look exclusively for evident, present success.

Great emphasis was placed on preparation for the next life since it came sooner rather than later for so many. Catherine's letters are full of this theme. To Miss Caroline White she wrote: "What is this poor miserable world but a place of sorrow and continual disappointment? God be praised it is not our fixed abode — only the weary road that leads to it."[11] And in another, "Each day is a step we take towards Eternity, and we shall continue thus to step from day to day until we take the last step which will bring us into the presence of God."[12] Life is definitely a pilgrimage to eternity. What most counts is the next life which makes it possible to confront so much present suffering.

Hope for eternal life helps a person be less overwhelmed by helplessness and less likely to look exclusively for evident, present success. One cannot prevent people from dying, but one can provide some comfort, dignity, order, and peace so that the dying can prepare themselves spiritually for this passage.

Catherine and her followers achieved a certain tranquility and peace in this constant confrontation with the sick and dying through the particular form of intimacy with Jesus that was fostered by the devotional life common to Catholics at that time. This spirituality was rooted in the *Devotio Moderna*, most familiar to us in *The Imitation of Christ*. This popular spiritual

classic encouraged practices and attitudes which imitated the virtues of Jesus in his passion. But even more than these qualities, it encouraged an intimacy with Jesus through his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Catherine also favored the Jesus psalter, a favorite with Irish Catholics during Penal Times. Like the Rosary, one could count the petitions on beads while reciting the series of ten invocations to Jesus. Catherine is reported to have recited one of the fifteen segments of this prayers every hour of the day.[13] Reciting this petitionary prayer in harmony with the rhythm of breathing or walking can produce a profound contemplative awareness.

Catherine also used the 1820 edition of a prayer book called *Devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Containing Exercises for Confession, Communion, and Holy Mass*. These reflections emphasize union with Jesus, gratitude for Christ's suffering, and the cultivation of the virtues demonstrated in the passion. In this type of meditation on the passion, Jesus is confidant, friend, spouse, redeemer, and endless source of compassion, love, and reconciliation.

This constant contemplation of Christ suffering was the wellspring of compassion for Catherine. Entering into the mystery of the redeeming Jesus was an experience of the depths of God's own compassion. She received in this way love which filled her and impelled her to be love and compassion for others. She rejected an angry or sadistic image of God who wanted human suffering as the price of redemption. Although the cross entered her life continually, she never attributed its appearance to an angry God.[14]

Suffering as Invitation to Conversion

How did Catherine adapt the piety of her age? From the days she lived with the Callaghans and throughout her religious life, she continued to read Scripture daily. Her image of Jesus was amplified by the Gospels beyond the content of the prayer books. She fully embraced and expressed the second theme that Galilea mentions — namely suffering as integral to conversion from sinfulness and egoism. She welcomed the suffering that came into her life, especially contradictions and set-backs as opportunities for personal conversion. She practiced self-denial so that she would have the capacity to accept freely and to respond creatively to the suffering that comes with discipleship of Jesus. The result was a capacity not to be controlled in decision-making by a fear of pain.

Catherine united Galilea's first and second themes by focusing her energies on the works of mercy rather than on physical asceticism. Nourished by the intimacy and union with Jesus in her devotional and apostolic life, she "practiced" the prescribed attitudes and virtues in the context of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. To this end, the asceticism she practiced and taught was a means to strengthen herself and her sisters so they could discover God in the poor and embrace the risk, suffering, and hardship of their work as intimately connected to love from God.

Catherine never romanticized the poor. She knew contact with the poor could evoke physical repulsion and she understood the contracting effects on character that extreme poverty can have. She wanted her sisters to be capable of a genuine love and respect for poor people which required spiritual maturity and the capacity not to be overly wounded by ingratitude, lack of affirmation, or apparent failure.

What mattered was that the poor were cared for — not the sisters' role in it.

Catherine's mature spiritual development shows a marked difference from her earlier anxiety dreams about the needs of the poor. She gradually gave the poor back to God. The poor were God's not hers alone. She was able to accept the withdrawal from Kingstown precisely because she knew God did not depend upon her or the Sisters of Mercy alone. When the community reached an impasse, she realized they were simply partners in God's work. What mattered was that the poor were cared for — not the sisters' role in it. She wrote to the young superior Teresa White: "We have done all that justice and prudence demand to avert this affliction. If it must come, let us receive it as the Holy Will of God in our regard. It will mortify us and that will be salutary, please God. . . . Do not be afflicted for your poor: their Heavenly Father will provide comfort for them . . . ."[15]

With God, Catherine could do what God wanted of her. If she lost a sense of this partnership, she would have quickly been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the needs that opened before her. If she encountered obstacles she could not overcome, then God would have to manage some other way.

This attitude resulted in a careful balance of hard work, affectionate relationships, prayer and recreation. She encouraged the sisters to "dance every night" when circumstances were difficult. And her lively sense of humor was evidence of her capacity not to become self-absorbed or worn down by the immensity of need.

Suffering as a Result of Discipleship

Galilea's third theme — the cross or suffering as a result of fidelity to discipleship is also clearly present in Catherine's spirituality although she does not often reflect on it explicitly. Galilea describes three different kinds of conflict which emerge in a disciple's following of Jesus in a particular social and historical context: (1) the kind of conflict Jesus evoked between

moral evil and divine goodness, (2) the kinds of inevitable conflicts that emerge between two fidelities, and (3) the conflicts we bring on ourselves because of our own egoism and human deficiencies. He suggests that the first type of conflict will inevitably emerge whenever followers of Jesus confront injustice. To enter into the reality of the life of the poor and to empower them to become subjects of their own liberation and participants in their struggle for justice will naturally result in conflict.

The second type of conflict, that between two fidelities, Galilea applies to conflicts within the ecclesial community. These are the types of conflicts we may ourselves experience within our own congregations, parishes, or other faith communities: good people differing about good things. And finally, we, unlike Jesus, are not free of sin. Our task is to recognize what we may ourselves contribute to any conflict situation with a readiness to meet conflict with love and to be open to our own need for reconciliation and healing.[16] Catherine attempted to avoid unnecessary conflict with consummate skill. She developed an irenic posture in the Armstrong household when she was under constant ridicule and attack for her Catholic beliefs. She responded with love and studied to acquire the doctrinal background she needed to represent her beliefs intelligently. She was consistently so loving that some of this family and both the Callaghans were eventually attracted to share her faith.

However, she did experience a certain amount of conflict and misunderstanding about her most essential calling which was to do the works of mercy. She departed from common expectations about how to treat the poor and how close to the wealthy they might live. She built her house of mercy in a fashionable neighborhood in order to bring employers and employees together and to create a market for needlework and laundry. The clergy and laity were not immediately enthusiastic about "the walking nuns" and their departure from cloistered religious life. Catherine, herself, agreed to become "a religious" — something initially repugnant to her — only because this decision insured the continuation of these works of mercy. Catherine's fidelity to her call provoked conflicts regardless of how muted they appear in her writings and how light she made of them.

The chaplaincy controversy is probably the best example of a conflict on all three levels. Catherine herself seemed to be quite stubborn in insisting that one priest should serve the house rather than accepting clerical rotation or dependency on the parish. She and the pastor differed strongly. Catherine seemed unwilling to yield to his proposals and insisted that services be held inside the house so as not to neglect the spiritual needs of the lay residents. She refused to give up what she felt were the actual needs of the ministry. She struggled for a long time with her inability to resolve this conflict; it caused her more personal distress than anything else she writes about. From our own perspective we would also see the gender and clerical issues involved in this dispute. However, in all of this conflict and distress, Catherine sought to be firm yet open and loving. She writes about the pain not causing a mean spirit, at least within the community. "We have just now indeed more than an ordinary portion of the Cross in this one particular, but . . . It has not the marks of an angry Cross, there is no disunion, no gloomy depression of spirits, no departure from charity proceeding from it."[17]

. . . as women we are alert to the negative effects of passive resignation to the oppression that affects us as well as that which affects the poor . . .

Catherine's spirituality of the Cross challenges us in our own following of Jesus today. Confrontation with suffering and pain remains a difficult aspect of Christian life for women today. A liberation spirituality of the cross enables us to accept and transform the unavoidable suffering that inevitably enters our life. It invites us to continual conversion from sin and egoism. It offers us a valuable spiritual resource and vision that can sustain our commitment to the works of mercy and justice to which we are called by our community's tradition.

Today it is hard to know what kinds of suffering are inevitable. Many of us have been deeply affected by our culture's attitude toward suffering. We no longer expect to suffer for <u>any</u> reason and we seek either to avoid or to overcome the causes of suffering. Further, as women we are alert to the negative effects of passive resignation to the oppression that affects us as well as that which affects the poor with whom we work. Thus, our response requires discernment, distinguishing between the suffering we ought to resist, overcome and avoid and the suffering which invites us more deeply into the paschal mystery.

We will continue to experience differences among us in community and ministry. Ecclesial people disagree mightily with one another when they often espouse quite different visions of church. And finally, as we situate our works of mercy and justice in a global and ecological perspective, it could be easy to become overwhelmed by the depth and extent of poverty and need throughout the world as well as in our own country. Third world countries may, in fact, be more like nineteenth-century Ireland in the overwhelming need they experience.

We are aware of how clearly the wealthy in Latin

America, for instance, recognize the threat to their interests posed by pastoral workers who attack the injustice that maintains the poverty of the majority. To proclaim the liberating message of the gospel and celebrate the presence of Jesus in the struggle of the people is guaranteed to bring active persecution and perhaps even death. I am convinced that each of us needs to reflect on how we respond to suffering in our lives. Do we experience the love and companionship of Jesus in our struggles, our illnesses, and our personal and communal limitations? Do we have any sense of how to move from "mere passive endurance of suffering to productive suffering?"[18] Does our personal suffering become for us the means of becoming "compassionate as our God in heaven is compassionate?" Can we look beyond the present moment to the consolation that will surely come and which in a sense comes even now through the mystery of Christ risen in our midst? Can we share a vibrant hope that the reign of God is at work in our struggle and in our peace, in our joy and in our emptiness?

Secondly, we need to ask ourselves if we can allow the pain that comes from conflict and misunderstanding that is at least partially rooted in our own sinfulness and limitation thus to transform us? Can we adopt exercises or practices that "act against" our selfish or compulsive impulse so that we become capable of greater generosity and authentic presence to others?

And finally, can we identify within our mission and life in mercy, the larger causes, purposes, and loves for which we are willing to encounter the cross of persecution or hardship? This will not be because we are looking for opportunities for sacrifices but simply because we can do no less than suffer the consequences of our faithfulness. Do we trust that God is indeed the liberator, the ally of the poor, the oppressed victim, the man of sorrows? If so, "we become free to choose Jesus, who at the beginning of his work renounced both power and freedom from suffering..."[19]

As Carolyn Osiek urges, the symbol of "the cross can become for women a symbol not of victimization and self-hatred, but of creative suffering, actively embraced, which transforms and redeems."[20] There will be suffering in our lives whether it is the result of limitation and vulnerability, the result of our resistance to sexism, the result of our work for social change, the result of our own sinfulness, or the result of our choosing integrity and faithfulness. And it is in that suffering that we, like Catherine, can be sustained by clinging to the crucified and risen Christ whom we profess to follow.

Footnotes

1. Ewert Cousins, "The Humanity and the Passion of Christ," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt, et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 375-391.

2. See Caroline Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages" in *Christian Spirituality II*, p. 121-139.

3. "The qualities that Christianity idealizes, especially for women, are also those of a victim: sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc. Since these are qualities idealized in Jesus 'who died for our sins,' his functioning as a model reinforces the scapegoat syndrome for women." Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 77.

4. Margaret Miles argues this point repeatedly in *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality*. (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

5. Egoism for women differs from men. For many women, the fundamental problem is one of lack of autonomy. The "sin" of such women is that of not acquiring a self. A theology of the cross may over-emphasize self-sacrificial love, making it even harder for these women to develop a sense of self capable of self-transcendence. See Ann Carr, *Transforming Grace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p.119.

6. Segundo Galilea, *The Way of Living Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 142-3. According to Edward Schillebeeckx, this third type is not suffering one chooses or seeks oneself, but the result of fidelity to the cause which one chooses. *Christ*, p. 724-5.

7. As Angela Bolster puts it, "Union with the suffering Christ was . . . for Catherine an intimate personal relationship, a self-knowledge of her own sinfulness and of His compassionate love, a recognition of Mercy as reconciliation and healing. 'Let us fly to the foot of the Cross and repose in the wounds of Jesus.'" *Positio: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of the Servant of God Catherine McAuley Founder of The Congregation of Sisters of Mercy, 1778-1841*. (Rome, 1985), p. 807.

8. Schillebeeckx, p. 696.

9. Cork MS. 1:11-14, reproduced in Bolster, *Positio*, p. 29

10. Ibid., p. 29.

11. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1827-1841*, ed. Sister M. Angela Bolster (Hanley, Stoke-on Trent, England: Webberley, Ltd., 1989), p. 157; to Miss Caroline White, October 26, 1841.

12. Cited in Bolster, *Positio*, p. 814-815.

13. Ibid, London, MS, p. 15.

14. *Correspondence*, p. 126, To M. Elizabeth Moore, March 21, 1840.

15. Ibid., p. 71, November 1, 1838.

16. Galilea, p. 145-152.

17. *Correspondence*, p. 50, To Francis Warde, January 17, 1838.

18. Dorothy Soelle, *Beyond Mere Obedience* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), p. 29.

19. Ibid., p. 30.

20. Carolyn Osiek, *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 65.

The Merciful Response to Violence

Julia Ann Upton, RSM

A question arose in the Spirituality Task Force of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology at its 1990 meeting regarding how merciful persons should respond to violence. Because of my extensive research and work in healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, I agreed to examine this issue for our group. Using Jesus of Nazareth and Catherine McAuley as models of mercy, I first examined their attitude toward violence. From that legacy I drew up a list of principles which could be applied to various encounters with violence. Finally, I applied those principles to two concrete examples of violence in our culture today — abortion and the crisis in the Middle East — and used them to consider these issues in courses I taught at St. John's University this past year.

Surfacing Principles

When I consider Jesus' approach to violence, several scenes from his life come to mind. I think of his response to the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:3-11), to the money-changers in the temple (Mk. 11:15-20), and to his follower's attack on the high priest's servant (Mt. 26:47-56). In none of these incidents did Jesus remain silent in the face of violence. Rather, he spoke the word of TRUST with compassion:

- "If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn. 8:7).
- "Does not scripture say: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples'?" (Mk. 11:17).
- "All who draw the sword shall die by the sword" (Mt. 26:53).

If Catherine McAuley taught her daughters anything, it was surely to put their whole trust in the providence of God. Although no specific scenes come to mind, through her correspondence and other writings, we have a clear picture of how Catherine stood in the face of violence. To the violation of the dignity of women in the society of her day, Catherine stood tall and spoke the word of TRUTH with compassion relentlessly through her innovative approach to the works of mercy, through her patience in dealing with the hierarchy, and in her gentle encouragement of those who joined her in ministry.

- "This is the way of God's providence. I suppose all will go on well to show us that what we think a drawback will be followed by greater progress" (Letter to Sister M. Francis Warde, Carlow — 9 Nov. 1840).[1]
- "While we place all our confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our exertions, etc." (Letter to Sister M. Francis Warde, 24 Nov. 1840).[2]
- "the grace must flow from our Divine Redeemer who came on earth not to bring the delusive enjoyment which we call peace, but a Heavenly Sword, sharpened on the cross, to cut those dearest ties that have such a strong hold on the heart, and thus to draw all to Himself" (To Miss Frances Gibson, Birmingham, prospective postulant — 28 March, 1841).[3]

In "The Spirit of the Institute" Catherine shows us the wellspring of her spirituality — faithful attention to the word of God. It is the same attentiveness we come to see in Jesus as we read the Gospels. Not only does he regularly go apart to pray, but he continually refers to the relationship he has with the Father. We see this most poetically in the Gospel according to John, but it shines through the other accounts as well. It is the "balanced life" which so much of the self-help literature of today expounds:

- . . . we must consider the time and exertion which we employ for the relief and instruction of the poor and ignorant as most conducive to our own advancement in perfection, and the time given to prayer and all other pious exercises, etc., we must consider as employed to obtain the grace, strength and animation which alone could enable us to persevere in the meritorious abnigations of our state. God . . . says "attend to thyself."[4]
- We must, in the midst of the rudeness, impiety and impatience which we shall witness, preserve meekness, piety and unwearied patience. But in order to do this, we must prepare by application to spiritual exercises: prayer, examen, lecture, penance and self-denial. From each of these we draw new aid and the grace of Jesus Christ, which will accompany us in all we undertake with a pure intention of pleasing Him alone.[5]

Without careful attention to our principal collaborator (God) and healthy attention to our physical, spiritual and emotional selves, we run the risk of being entrapped ourselves in the spiral of violence, unable to speak the TRUTH with compassion.[6]

The principles I derive from considering the attitudes of Jesus and Catherine McAuley to violence are:

a. Give faithful attention to the presence of God in prayer.
b. Trust ultimately in God's providence.
c. Have faith in human resourcefulness and resilience.
d. Do not dismiss anyone from the circle of conversation, for conversation can lead to conversion.
e. Do not let denominationalism interfere with the

works of mercy.

f. Tone down judgment and turn up compassion.

Applying Principles

Since Roe v. Wade I have had a difficult time with the abortion issue. It has never seemed to be a "black-and-white" issue for me. Lost in the vast gray in-between, I found myself voiceless. In my early adulthood, before the legalization of abortion, I knew three women whose lives were cut short by unwanted pregnancies. One committed suicide early in her pregnancy; another died in the wake of a disastrous illegal abortion. A third was so severely scarred by an unqualified back-alley abortionist that she suffered repeated miscarriages before she was able to carry a pregnancy to term, and that only after months in bed and her cervix sutured. When the debates began, the faces of these women appeared before me, silencing me. It seemed as if I had no voice.

Then one Sunday, after Vespers at the Cathedral, when Bishop Walter Sullivan (Richmond, VA) addressed the assembled congregation on the "atrocity" of abortion, I found my voice. During the question/answer period, I asked him not to speak of abortion as an unpardonable sin, but to include in his presentations the compassion and reconciliation so characteristic of Jesus.

Over the years, I have found a voice on the abortion issue a few more times, but never a place on the platform. Prayer has led me to see more often what is missing in the debate and given me the courage to speak. I wrote "The Hidden Grief of Abortion" which was published in 1982 in *Pastoral Psychology*. That led to my being invited to speak at Notre Dame on the subject of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing in the summer of 1987. I was also asked to contribute the article on "Abortion and Pastoral Care" to the *1990 Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*.

. . . our concern for alternatives to abortion should be just as passionate as our outcry against abortion.

Despite my occasional ability to speak, however, the rhetoric used by so many people in the "pro-life" movement continued to annoy and frustrate me, but the final blow was dealt one morning when the *New York Times* reported that our newly installed Bishop of Brooklyn would begin holding monthly prayer vigils outside abortion clinics. Abortion, in my opinion, is far from the most pressing social problem of this huge city, and to focus media attention only on that one issue does a grave disservice to all the people of New York. As I jogged that morning, I seethed first, then listened and prayed. Given a word to speak, I dashed home and typed out a letter on my computer. That letter was only the beginning of my saga.

In what I regarded as a collegial spirit, I made several suggestions to Bishop Daily of ways I thought he could bring compassion rather than judgment to the arena of discussion. My thesis has always been that our concern for alternatives to abortion should be just as passionate as our outcry against abortion. While suspecting the opposite to be true, I involved my undergraduate theology class in a research project testing that theory on abortion alternatives.

Although my friends in the Chancery told me that Bishop Daily thought my letter to him was "brash," they assured me that he was open to the idea of conversing with me on the subject. Armed with my students' research, I visited him one cold morning in January with one clear message in mind. I wanted him to know that most women have abortions NOT because they have a choice but because they believe they have no other choice.

The story of the students' research was published in the April 5, 1991 issue of *Commonweal* to which reaction has been long, steady, and surprisingly positive. *Catholic Digest* bought the article from *Commonweal* and published an abridged version in the July 1991 issue. I was interviewed for a related story by Tom Schaefer, a columnist for the Wichita Eagle, and that syndicated article appeared there and in several other papers around the country. So the tale is still being told.

There were over one hundred students in my class, and in our initial conversation on the subject of unplanned pregnancies, it was immediately obvious that the church was the last place they would ever turn for help. They had concluded that since the church so vehemently opposes abortion, no one in the local parishes would be willing to help anyone who faced such a crisis. Similarly, they believed that once a woman obtained an abortion she would never be able to return to the church. It should also be noted that although not all students in the course were Roman Catholic, seventy-three per cent were, and most of them had attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

When I proposed my thesis to the students — that because the church strongly opposes abortion, we should expect it to support and encourage alternatives just as strongly — the idea surprised but intrigued them. So I presented them with a scenario and a question, and sent them off in search of answers.

Here is the scenario: they have a close friend who has just discovered she is pregnant. Unmarried and still in college, she believes that abortion is her only reasonable choice. The students, being opposed to abortion themselves, want to help her consider alternatives. But what alternatives are there? I asked them to

start looking in their local churches for answers and to chart the course of their investigation.

While the undergraduates were visiting local churches of various denominations, one of the department's graduate assistants was searching through recent issues of our diocesan newspaper to uncover articles or advertisements focused on abortion alternatives. There were many articles on abortion — eleven in one issue alone; not one featuring alternatives.

While the students were reluctant to engage in this research project at first, they quickly became deeply involved in the issue. Before class I could hear them sharing their experiences and energizing each other in the process. At first their enthusiasm and interest surprised me, but I soon realized that given the fact they they range in age from 18 to 27, it was more probable than possible that all had lived my scenario — either having had a friend unmarried and pregnant, being pregnant themselves, or even suspecting it. This was definitely "theology in the trenches" as one of my colleagues labeled our project.

The students contacted eighty-nine churches . . . only thirty-nine (of these) provided . . . any alternatives to abortion.

Their data proved to be both alarming and heartening. The students contacted eighty-nine churches and of the eighty-nine clergy contacted there, only thirty-nine provided them with any alternatives to abortion. The remaining fifty clergy persons told the students to send their friend to discuss the problem in person. When the students insisted that their friend wasn't yet willing to speak with a priest/minister, they were given no further assistance, but told the problem was too difficult for them to handle.

The thirty-nine churches that responded positively to the students' requests for information represent several different denominations, with the Roman Catholic parishes, on the whole, being less helpful than reformed communities. One Episcopal pastor even referred the student to the neighboring Lutheran pastor, a women. The students were more surprised by the help they received at the reformed churches than the difficulties they encountered at local Roman Catholic parishes because they mistakenly assumed that only the Roman Catholic Church is opposed to abortion.

Students were referred to a wide variety of "alternatives." Two students were referred, I hope by accident, to abortion clinics. One was even referred to a nursing home sponsored by Catholic Charities! (I can only presume that the word "Madonna" in its title conjured up the image of a hostel for unwed mothers.) Our initial list contained forty-one different crisis centers, adoption agencies, and hot-line numbers. When we contacted each of the forty-one centers to verify the availability and extent of their resources, however, we discovered that the students had been given an abundance of mis-information. Our final list, once the erroneous information had been eliminated, included fourteen organizations offering a variety of resources — adoption agencies, counseling services, hot-line numbers, etc.

Even the process of following up on the information given to the students was somewhat frustrating. In several instances, widely circulated hot-line numbers, advertised as serving the public twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, led me from one answering machine to another. How would I have felt if I were unmarried, pregnant and desperate?

Twenty-four of the thirty-nine clergy who suggested alternatives, referred students to various Birthright organizations in our area, showing that at least the name "Birthright" seems to have a ring of familiarity to parish personnel. A small advertisement for Birthright appears twice a month in our diocesan newspaper, and students reported a few of their parish churches post information on Birthright as well. They were disappointed to learn, however, that Birthright does not receive significant funding from the Church and must rely almost exclusively on donations and fundraising.

Another disturbing issue the data disclosed was that women fared better with the people they contacted than men did. In three cases, women and men both contacted the same parish unintentionally, and received radically different treatment. Could it be that even though both were requesting information for a friend, the men were stereotyped as the culprit?

A few students were fortunate enough to interview priests who were not only knowledgeable about abortion alternatives, but willing to provide financial, spiritual and emotional support as well. One of our campus ministers even offered to accompany my student's friend to Birthright. Another student wrote, "I thought it would be really hard and uncomfortable, but I felt strangely safe, almost hugged. If I were pregnant, I know I could go and not be badgered or reprimanded, but sincerely helped."

After completing her project at an upstate parish, one of the students began to wonder how she would be treated if she were the one pregnant, so she went to her parish church and presented (or misrepresented) herself as pregnant and desperate. She met with the pastor, who immediately made her feel comfortable. "Never once did he make me feel dirty or cheap or tell me I should never have had pre-marital sex."

Monsignor offered to introduce her to women in the parish who had made three different choices —

abortion, adoption, and raising the child alone — to hear their stories. He also suggested that since she was still considering abortion she ought to attend a meeting of "Rachel Weeping," a local support group for women who have had abortions, to learn from them what the after-effects of abortion might be. In the event that she chose abortion, though, he also told her that he would help her work through the after-effects. The most important thing he did for her, however, was enable her to see that this was not the end of the world, that life would go on and everything would turn out for the best. At the end of their session he reminded her that he, the church and God would always be there. "He told me to go and pray and find peace within me, and that he would be available anytime — day or night," she wrote.

It was a stunning encounter, and the only one of such depth recorded by any of the one-hundred students. I hope that compassionate priests are more numerous than these surveys showed.

Although I would have preferred it if the students' research had disproved my thesis, now that I see more clearly the paucity of information available on alternatives to abortion, it is obvious to me that supporting and "advertising" alternatives is one important way in which I can personally respond to the violence of abortion.

An even more encouraging part of the story, though, concerns my relationship with our Bishop. Armed with the data gathered by my students, Bishop Daily went to his Sanctity of Life Commission and mandated that they immediately set up a center for those involved in crisis pregnancies with a twenty-four hour professionally staffed "hotline". That center was in place by the first week in April although it still has a long way to go in being effective and efficient. Bishop Daily also wrote to every pastor and principal in the diocese asking them to publicize the hotline number as widely as possible within the parish and school buildings as well as in correspondence.

Not only did I put my initial principles into practice, I now realize, but I also showed the students how to do likewise. They shared the results of the research as well as the unfolding story of my conversations with the Bishop. For them abortion is no longer either a "Catholic" issue or one that is seen only from its extremes — as simply "black or white".

Facing the War

Spring semester last year began with the "outbreak" of the Gulf War. With sixty students enrolled in my Christian Spirituality and Mysticism courses, the questions and anxieties we surfaced the first day of class were far different from those examined in any other semester.

During the semester Campus Ministry provided some rich experiences of prayer and ritual while U.S. troops were actively engaged in combat in the Middle East. On the first Friday of the way, a prayer service was held during which an enormous circle of peace was cast on the Great Lawn of the campus. Each person attending the service was given a brick, and as part of the ritual they constructed a circle with the bricks. It stood as a living memorial for the entire semester. People could go there to pray for peace, and day by day other symbols began to appear in the center of the circle — often flowers, planted in the frozen ground, standing as a bold promise of the peace for which we longed. The campus had its share of yellow ribbons, too, but the circle stood longer and more proudly, drawing people to pray as they passed by on their way to and from class.

For us . . . the war didn't end in triumph, but in compassion and confusion.

In class we continually used the war as a lens through which we examined the meaning and sources of spirituality — its history and its lived experience. While the media tried to divert our attention elsewhere, we carefully attended to the religious dimensions and implications of relations with the Islamic World. For us, consequently, the war didn't end in triumph, but in compassion and confusion. The louder the blare of victory, the deeper grew our compassion for those unnamed and uncounted thousands — dead, wounded, grieving, homeless, and starving. The clearer success was touted, the more confused we became over the issues involved, particularly the religious ones. While others chanted slogans, we prayed and wondered when the next outbreak of war would be economically feasible or politically advantageous.

Although I had not articulated them at the time, as I now look at it, the principles that I surfaced at the beginning of this paper are deeply ingrained in the way I live out the Mercy charism in academia. In responding mercifully to the violence in the world, in my life, or in myself, the most important element for me is finding that voice. "One does what one can," is my usual chant, and I could hope for nothing more than that at the end of my earthly life Jesus would say of me, as he did of the "sinful" woman who intruded upon the meal at Simon's house, "She has done what was in her power to do" (Mk. 14:8).

Footnotes

1. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1827-1841*, edited by Sister M. Angela Bolster (Ireland: Sisters of Mercy of the Dioceses of Cork and Ross, 1989), p. 164.

2. *Correspondence*, p. 169.

3. *Correspondence*, p. 212.

4. *Correspondence*, p. 242.

5. *Correspondence*, p. 243.

6. In a recent book, *La Violence Nécessité ou Liberté?* (Namur: Culture et Vérité, 1991), Edouard Herry concludes that the root of all violence is the fear of death.

7. "Father, I'm Pregnant. What Do You Suggest?", *Commonweal*, 118, (April 5, 1991), pp. 217-219.

8. Although their study focused primarily on local Roman Catholic communities, they also contacted Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Baptist, and Congregational churches as well as a local Jewish Center, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhist, and Hindu community leaders.

9. A recent book further develops this particular cultural phenomenon. *Men and Abortion: Lessons, Losses, and Love*, by Arthur Shostak, Gary McLouth and Lynn Seng (Praeger, 1984) surveyed male "abortion veterans" in 18 states, and demonstrated that most of the men suffered psychological *sequelae* — feelings of isolation, anger at themselves and their partners, and fear of physical and emotional damage to the women involved.

Contributors

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Devotion to the Passion of Christ: A South African Slant

Jean Evans, RSM

Recently, while on home-leave in California, I visited our community vacation house in Saratoga. There were a few sisters sitting by the pool. One of them, whom I had not seen in at least five years, asked, "How has being in South Africa affected your spirituality?" I was taken by surprise, hesitated for a bit, then muttered something. After all, I was on vacation and had put South Africa far behind me for these seven weeks. I wanted to forget about it for a while. However, a few weeks later, I began to realize that the question deserved reflection, and as I mulled it over I could see that being here has affected my spirituality. It has drawn me more deeply into the reality of the passion of Christ.

What I have learned of the passion, I have learned from the poor. So I will recount some incidents, and in that way share the simple truths that have begun to take root in me.

It is Possible to Rejoice in the Midst of Hardship

In 1984, after a period of searching as to where to put my energies, I volunteered to work for a year with the Sisters of Mercy in South Africa. I was to work with another sister in visiting and discovering ways of assisting people to improve the quality of their lives. The place: Winterveld, a dusty, impoverished, garbage-covered area 600 sq. kms. in size, located about 30 kms. from Pretoria in the homeland of Bophuthatswana. It bears the ravages of the apartheid regime — over 1 million resettled persons (and an over-abundance of goats which seem to eat anything that is green). The poor live without proper housing, water, sewerage, roads, electricity, not to mention education or medical care. It is a community symbolized, for me, by the memory of three or four dirty, ill-clad children walking along the highway while pushing wheelbarrows. These are heavily laden with plastic containers filled with water which they have purchased from landowners.

Not long after I arrived, I was invited to a child's baptismal celebration. After the meal I offered to give a few people a ride to the main road where they could get better connections to their homes. We were hardly on the sand road two minutes when we had a flat tire, a "puncher" as it is commonly called. My first thoughts: there's no phone, no AAA, and I have a van-load of twelve disgruntled passengers. What am I going to do? No sooner had I gotten out of the van to inspect the wheel than the women began singing and dancing outside. Turning around I saw that two men — strangers on the road-side and still in their Sunday best — had already rolled up their sleeves and begun to change the tire. We continued the singing and drove on our way.

When You're Suffering, it is Possible to Have a Heightened Awareness of the Sufferings of Others

My one year commitment began in a small mission in the village of Mmakau. In 1984 it had a population of about 40,000 people most of whom lived in tin shanties. Ironically, the setting is superb: the villagers live nestled near a mountain of red rock, which the presence of boulders, cactus plants and thorn trees makes breathtaking. Here are two diary entries from my first month in Mmakau:

> ***Nov. 10, 1984:*** *Went to Mrs. Diale, a blind woman who lives in a tin shack. It was hot in there today. Her brother came by. Among other things he said how awful it was to see the poor, starving people in Ethiopia. But he also acted it out, writhing in pain. Mrs. Diale agreed.*
>
> ***Nov. 21, 1984:*** *Today, the Motsepe's got Sammy back out of the hospital after his being hit severely by hail stones. They're both out of work. They asked if they could come with us every Tuesday night to visit the people in the hospital. They asked us to pray for Sammy. He was up playing later on.*

The Passion of Christ is a Confrontation with Evil

After three years of living in Mmakau and working in Winterveld, I was transferred to Soweto. There I was to teach part-time in the high school and to begin working with the homeless.

Like any inner city, Soweto is fraught with problems of the urban poor: alcoholism, family violence, drug abuse, homelessness, high crime rate, dense population (estimated at 2 million). But this place, called the "heartbeat of Azania" (suggested name for one new South Africa) is also full of the problems related to our unjust society.

Two weeks after I had arrived in January, 1988, I got a message during my English class to come immediately to the squatter area about one mile away from school. "Stop the police from demolishing our shacks." I approached the white man who was directing the operation and asked why this was happening. "I cannot tell you," he said. "You must go to the Soweto Council." That afternoon I did go and got no satisfaction. The demolition continued. At 6:00 p.m. we phoned the Red Cross to get tents for the people.

In a more recent incident, a leader of another group of homeless people, about 3,000 - 4,000 squatters, had been offered the possibility of housing through his firm. He refused the offer because he did not want to leave the people without a leader. "We are human beings. We are not dogs. We have dignity," he said. In the course of a few years he helped the homeless to form their own organization, "Operation Masakhane" (Let's Build Together).

They wore printed T-shirts, made plans to build a day-care center for their children, obtained funding for the building of a community center, organized a sewing/knitting cooperative, distributed food and blankets to the elderly poor. Their committee met regularly to iron out difficulties, see about improving conditions, e.g. water and toilets, and had obtained a post box so that they would have an address. Mandla had given the Mofolo Squatters dignity and hope.

Then everything changed. Within a matter of two months' time the camp became politicized and the presence of Inkatha (Zulus from Natal) added to the difficulty. In less than a month three committee members had been shot dead in their homes, Mandla's house had been broken into and his property stolen. His mother's house had been petrol bombed. Residents fled for safety, many of them leaving possessions behind in their tin shacks. When they returned, they found their belongings had been taken. Plans for the community center had to be abandoned, funds returned to donors.

By the Power Flowing from His Wounds, Evil is Defeated and Hope is Restored

Mandla's wife was in the house when it was bombed. She was uninjured, but knew that the family would have to move somewhere else. She found a place about 3 hours away where she obtained a residence permit and a site. Most of her possessions were taken or destroyed, but she said, "What I really need is a shovel, a pick and a hose." "A hose?" I queried. "Yes, Sister Jean, for my garden."

After the recent spate of killings and police harassment at another squatter camp called Chicken Farm, the same thing happened. People ran for their lives. Our small pre-school was closed, the night school for adult literacy ended abruptly. After four months, it seemed that things would never return to normal. However, in the last few weeks, people have begun moving back. I saw one familiar face the other day, a Mozambican man who waved and came over to the truck for a few words. "You're back, Frans," I said. "Yes," he said, "we've got nowhere else to go. The God will protect us."

A present day expression of devotion to the passion is the Prayer Around the Cross that is a part of the life and prayer at Taize and in those centers of faith in the world where it is celebrated on Friday evenings. I see that prayer, and in particular the opportunity to come up around the cross, as a universal way (at least for Christians) of expressing confidence in the power of Christ's saving death. It is a prayer of deep faith that I have experienced in California, in Taize and in South Africa. It is a prayer of surrender and healing. "Let us often fly to the Cross," said Catherine, "and repose in the wounds of Jesus." It is the prayer that the humble and agonizing Christ of this time and place brings to the exalted and risen Christ who accompanies us on our journey. "There will be one Christ loving himself," says Augustine. This is the mystery for me — Christ in the broken body finding strength and healing from the Christ whose body was brutalized. It is the mystery of transformation, of death into life.

For me, in particular, the wounded side has come to mean a lot. Thomas was invited to put his hand there. I was invited to come into his wounded side, too. Catherine McAuley must have been also, otherwise she would not have told us to "fly" there to "repose." Again, a mystery; called into his wounded side mystically and really. Here it seems that there is some correlation between being drawn into the wounds of the Body and being called or invited into the wounded side of Jesus where one finds healing and wholeness. For me, the invitation into his wounded side came in the midst of a most frustrating time here in Soweto. Yet, the frustration was not paralyzing.

My belief is that all of us as sharers in the charism are invited into the Lord's wounded side. So our devotion to the passion is something that comes to us from the inside out. God gives it to us just as we are given the broken, porous body of Christ to hold in our hands. The passion of Jesus is a wellspring from which we get the energy to face the many sufferings of life in Soweto and at the same time those very sufferings plunge us deeper into Christ in search of strength and endurance to keep meeting the suffering head on. It's all paradox and in the chaos here and the absence of meaning or reason for so much evil, it is only the Lord that we can cling to. This gift, devotion to the passion of Christ, is what South Africa has offered me.

Book Review:
With All Our Heart and Mind
The Spiritual Works of Mercy in a Psychological Age

By Sidney Callahan
Reviewed by Marie Michele Donnelly, RSM

To admonish the sinner; To instruct the ignorant;
To counsel the doubtful; To comfort the sorrowful;
To bear wrongs patiently; To forgive all injuries;
To pray for the living and the dead.

For most of us the spiritual works of mercy, as well as their corporal counterparts, have been part of our spiritual consciousness since childhood. As Sisters of Mercy we may have them depicted in some creative manner in stained glass in chapel windows, on celebrative banners or on artistically crafted notecards. But, familiarity aside, what meaning do they really have for us today as we reflect together as Institute on Catherine's words that these works of mercy are indeed the very "business of our lives"?

Sidney Callahan, in what she herself describes as a "reflective meditation", has attempted to rethink the spiritual works of mercy and their application for our time. She contends that the need for the corporal works of mercy does not change — their application is clear. She feels, however, that the application of the spiritual works of mercy is different, because with changes in our psychological, social, and theological understanding of human persons, neither the need nor the appropriate response is obvious. That conclusion, in itself, got my attention. Early on, I had the distinct impression that Sidney Callahan was writing with Catherine looking over her shoulder, searching for the "signs of the time."

The works of mercy are described as a Christian's response to God's love; they are love in action. But, as if echoing Catherine's exquisite sensitivity to the dignity of each person, the author reminds her readers that as wounded imperfect persons we do not do works of mercy as though we possess all good things in abundance. We are called to mutuality, to being with the other in a dynamic interrelationship that affects us as we act.

Callahan sees the spiritual works of mercy as ways "to see persons through" trying times — like all mercy, they are forms of love in action, ways of meeting human need. And interestingly, she sees the seven in ascending order of spiritual and psychological difficulty.

Even though specific insights are directed at educators, spiritual directors and counselors, every chapter may be read through the prism of the charism to find particular applications for our lives in ministry and in community:

- *Admonishing the sinner is an effort to liberate another through Christ's saving power of love.*
- *The golden rule of all instruction is to become biodegradable, to pass on a self-generating process so that one's teaching is no longer needed.*
- *When we are called to counsel the doubtful we must seek to know who it is we are meeting and value them. The ability to listen and to truly learn how another sees the world is the first rule of any form of counseling.*
- *A true comforter will offer love in a thousand different ways, over and over, with subtlety and finesse.*
- *To bear wrongs patiently is an active form of love and power.*
- *To forgive is to be forgiven; to be forgiven empowers forgiveness; love begets mercy and mercy begets more love.*
- *When we pray for others we recognize them as fellow creatures beloved by God, and so we must seek God's will for them as well as for ourselves. The realization immediately transforms the way we attend to other persons.*

Throughout the book, the author repeatedly advises approaching each activity with the wiliness of serpents and the innocence of doves, and with an abundance of joy and humor — good advice, I think, for any enterprise of *Mercy!*

Any mature Christian will find Sidney Callahan's reflections insightful and challenging, and even more so, I believe, will women of Mercy, as we engage in all our "tripping about" while striving to remain centered in God.

With All Our Heart and Mind. Sidney Callahan. The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1988. 200 pp., $8.95.

Questions for Study/Reflection

1. In what ways are you experiencing new life emerging in difficult, painful circumstances?

2. Is there any suffering you are experiencing as a result of doing justice and mercy?

3. For Catherine, the cross of Jesus led to freedom and empowerment for ministry rather than resignation to the status quo. Where/how do you experience this?

4. Evil, pain, conflict, violence, and struggle raise questions of faith. What are the questions that emerge for you? What practices or disciplines help you to be neither paralyzed by such experiences nor deterred from compassionate service?

5. How does the charism of union and charity express itself for you today? How does it aid us in becoming more compassionate women?

6. How do we nourish and sustain in each other the capacity for a contemplative compassion, for finding life and joy in the face of conflict or suffering?

7. How have you "been seized by God" in and through your experience of life and ministry? Where has this led you?

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