The MAST Journal

The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology

VOL. 2, NO. 3 SUMMER 1992

Evangelization and The New World

Summer, 1992

Dear Readers,

1992 marks the fifth centenary of the landing of Columbus and other Europeans in what came to be called the Americas. This remembrance offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on how our enculturation might influence misunderstandings of Christianity and the actions or attitudes we associate with being Christian or being mercy. In addition to the horse, disease, and sugar, the Europeans brought Christianity to these continents and islands. And unfortunately, because of the way Christianity was widely understood and lived, the Europeans destroyed many peoples and cultures with the sanction of Christianity. While in the Dominican Republic recently, I attended a Palm Sunday service during which the people waved their palm branches and, in almost pep rally fashion, shouted "Christos ayer, Christos hoy, Christos siempre" ("Christ yesterday, Christ today, Christ forever"). I could not help but shudder at the potential violence that such fervor could unleash.

And yet, encouraging one another to discover and be faithful to that which promises a fuller humanness among us is essential in our world. Christianity is one religious expression offering fullness of life not only to individuals but also to our world, and evangelization seems especially crucial in the light of the many agonies we experience. However, the what of Christianity and the how it is preached must be carefully considered. The articles in this issue edited by Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt (Burlingame) include reflection on issues related to the quincentenary remembrance.

With this issue we begin the occasional publication of addresses or presentations that even though delivered to a smaller group among us seem to have relevance for the life of our Institute. Margaret A. Farley"s (Detroit) presentation at the opening of the Baltimore regional community chapter in January, 1992 contains reflections to aid us in living into the reality of our direction statement.

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.

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Mercy Reflections on the Fifth Centenary

Deborah Watson, R.S.M.

Several months ago my friend, Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, wrote to me giving me the "opportunity" to write an article for MAST on the Quincentenary commemoration of the "discovery" of America. I hesitated, suspecting a plot to draw me back into a world of academia from which I had long since divorced myself and knowing that my kerosene lamp, toy-like typewriter and lack of access to an organized library (not to mention word-processors, microfiche, etc.) would make the task very difficult. Besides, I felt I would have little to add to the reams of printed material celebrating, commemorating, denouncing or probing the significance of the arrival of Columbus and the subsequent evangelization of ABIA YALA or "mature land", the Mayan name for North and South America.[1]

But later I had the graced experience of traveling, mostly by land, from Puno (where I live and work among the Aymara people of the Peruvian Altiplano) through La Paz, Bolivia; Asunción, Paraguay; Iguazú Falls, Brazil-Argentina, San Ignacio, Buenos Aires, Northern Patagonia and Jujuy in Argentina; Potosí, Bolivia and back to Puno.

The process of conquering and colonizing the Americas involved the largest genocide and ethnocide ever recorded.

Inspired by this journey through a myriad of cultural worlds, by the symbolic force of the Iguazú Falls, and by the warm hospitality of the Argentinian Mercies, with whom I spent a month, I decided "yes." I might have something to share that would be one Sister of Mercy's very personal reflection on how this commemoration might challenge and move us as daughters of Catalina McAuley.

As a backdrop for these reflections, it seems important to make several clarifications. In the first place, the request for this article included the suggestion that I not get embroiled in the "for" or "against" Columbus polemic. However, standing where I stand, within what once was one of the political divisions of the mighty Inca Empire of Tahuantinsuyu, among a people oppressed and exploited for centuries; and living within a country where 80% of the population survives below the official poverty level, with millions living in dire misery, it is impossible to view the Conquest with any sense of triumphalism. I have come to love a people for whom the invasion of 1492 (Dominican Republic), 1519 (Mexico) or 1532 (Peru) has been expressed this way:

Then everything was good
and then the gods were cut down . . .
Wasn't that what the foreigners did
when they came here?
They taught us fear,
came to make the flowers wither.
To let their flowers live
they damaged and swallowed up our flower . . .[2]

The process of conquering and colonizing the Americas involved the largest genocide and ethnocide ever recorded. The estimated population of Latin America in 1492 was about 100,000,000. One hundred years later it had been reduced to between 10 and 12 million by war, slavery and disease.[3] Whole civilizations — aztec, mayan, incan among others — were virtually wiped out and their survivors subjected to a psychic disintegration, the effects and memory of which can be felt into the present. On the journey I mentioned, it was my privilege to stand in "holy" places pulsating with the suffering of these peoples. At the Jesuit reduction of San Ignacio, Argentina one recalls the thousands of Guaraní people rounded up into compounds and later massacred or scattered in the face of colonial forces of which they were victims. In the new sleepy Andean town of Potosí one remembers the millions of Aymara and Quechua people who lost their lives to fill the coffers of Spain. A stone's throw from my house in Chucuito, Peru is a present-day bus stop. It was once a pick-up point for the men being forcibly taken to work in these silver mines of Potosí; and to this day the site is considered a bad-luck place.

But not only the memory lives on; so does the reality of colonization and exploitation by the Western First World. Speaking of Latin America[4], current literature identifies three stages of conquest: the initial invasion by the Spanish and Portuguese, the economic "expansion" by the Europeans, and the largely U.S. domination of the last half of this century. Two examples of the latter would be the policies of the IMF as they are forced on Latin American countries; and the fact that 75% of Peruvian minerals are controlled by U.S. interests.

Hence, any responsible treatment of the Fifth Centenary must acknowledge the various ways that the historical processes initiated by the voyages of Columbus are being named: discovery of America, encounter between two worlds, genocide, destruction of civilizations, invasion, conquest of the Americas, Christian evangelization of pagan peoples, colonization of the new world, first evangelization, etc. Obviously, each of these "namings" flows out of a perspective on the original events and results in the desire to commemorate 1492 in a particular way. Therefore

we encounter references to celebration, call to repentance, beginning of a new evangelization, celebration of resistance, rendering of accounts, etc. The complexity of these perspectives cannot be developed here, but they do provide a context for my reflections and hint at some themes that I would like to pursue in anwer to the question: How do we as Sisters of Mercy ministering in Latin America respond to the prophetic call inherent in a true understanding of the significance of these last 500 years of American history?

For me the Iguazú Falls were a profound symbol of the cultural clashes brought about by the Conquest and the innumerable identity issues that remain unresolved. Rivers flowing from different directions through diverse lands and cultures, moving swiftly toward the hurling, foaming, crashing encounter of a myriad (over 200) separate catapulting cataracts, unite and emerge below in what appears to be one serenely flowing river. This water, running as it has, with such turbulence and such peacefulness through centuries of cultural over-lay, spoke to me of the complexity and frequent unrest of the Latin American reality and of the Fifth Centenary itself as a moment in which the conflicts may be faced and a hard look at the past may contain within it the energy to create a new synthesis for the future.

Within . . . Mercy communities, the anger of centuries must be allowed to surface, to be experienced and expressed so that new energy may be made available for a new evangelization.

And contemplating this I ask how do we as Sisters of Mercy fit into this new creation? Having traveled through the primarily indigenous culture of the Andean Altiplano, through the fascinating blend that is Paraguay where to this day Quaraní remains an official and spoken language by a largely *mestizo* or *criolla* population[5], and into the mostly white, European-influenced metropolis of Buenos Aires, it seemed to me that as Sister of Mercy in Latin America one of our primary challenges has to do with personal and cultural identity.

Within ourselves as community groupings in Latin America we reflect this diversity and the multitude of identity issues inherent in that diversity. In the measure that we successfully and honestly confront these issues, which are often manifested in conflicts, we will be able to respond to the same concerns in each of our ministry situations. From the strength of our own struggle we will reach out in creative compassion to the swarming masses of Latin America who are searching to know who they are and how they can be part of a just world order: the poor, women, indigenous, *mestizos*.

But exactly how do we reflect this cultural diversity? Let me use South America as the example because that is what I know best. In Argentina, Peru, Brazil and Chile there are some 125 Sisters of Mercy. Besides the obvious national differences, there are foreigners and "natives." There are racial differences: Whites, *mestizos* and indigenous. There are members of the Institute of the Americas and those affiliated with Mercy Congregations in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, England and Ireland. There are those who are here for a limited time as missioners and those who will live and die here. There are those who are or have been oppressed and those who are identified with the oppressors. Let me give more specific examples. The Argentinian group (Detroit Regional Community) was virtually all born in Argentina and many would call themselves *criollas*. Most of the Peruvian professed Sisters (Cork, Ireland; New Foundland, Canada; and Merion Regional Community) would be identified as *mestizos*. The Sisters in Brazil are from Ireland; one novice is Aymara (Burlingame Regional Community).

The current literature surrounding the 500 year commemoration has much to say about the identity issues.[6] Indigenous are being challenged to re-claim their identity; *mestizos* are being called to discover who they are;[7] women are summoned to emerge from silence and submission, to organize and to act out of a dignity violated by the conquistadores and subsequently by a male-oriented mestizo society. Within our own Mercy communities, the anger of centuries must be allowed to surface, to be experienced and expressed so that new energy may be made available for a new evangelization. Where community life is strong these difficult issues can be faced with faith and commitment and in the spirit of Catherine McAuley who welcomed women into the Congregation regardless of their social class or economic status.

The recent Direction Statement of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas re-states major emphases of our charism and articulates clearly who we must be with such special relevance to the situation in which we find ourselves in Latin America:

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 within 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.[8]

. . . we, as women of Mercy are challenged to live out, to struggle with, and to celebrate the multi-cultural, multi-racial, international fabric of our lives.

In Latin America we have a unique opportunity to experience and embrace a broad multi-cultural and international reality. One of the distinct challenges of the next years will be the creation of structures that will strengthen our identity as Mercies and enable us to better express Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor. The Latin American and Caribbean Conference (meeting in Jamaica in July of 1992) is one expression of this desire for greater solidarity among us. And the South American section (which meets in Santiago de Chile in February of 1993) will be considering the possibility of a joint foundation in one of the countries of South America where "Mercy" is now not present. This would be seen not only as a gesture in commemoration of the Quincentenary, but also as a positive move toward merging our separate national identities, creating a wider space for mutual cooperation, and forming the personal bonds that must be the foundation of any such unity. In this context it might be well to recall that the miracle of the first Pentecost was not that the new Christians all spoke the same language, but that speaking in their own language they understood one another. (Acts 2:8).

The challenge formulated by the Institute General Chapter as a call to conversion in our life-styles and ministries harmonizes profoundly with the Latin American reflection on religious life that has as its starting point the option for the poor, the desire of liberation theology to view history and do theology from the underside, from the perspective of those without power. And so Latin American religious speak frequently of "living for the poor, living with the poor, living as the poor, and giving one's life for the poor."[9] Committed as we are to Catherine's undisputed option, can we do less than adopt this ideal of "insertion"?

Returning to the image of the Iguazú Falls and to the call inherent in viewing the conquest of the Americas from the perspective of the vast majority who were and still are crucified by these events, we cannot stand and simply appreciate the movement of the water from afar. We must plunge in with all the risks and asceticism that this involves.

Any effort to walk with the poor will lead us to a spirituality of the cross. Most of us have heard the words of Catherine's Original Rule: "Ours is a Congregation founded on Calvary to serve a crucified Redeemer." And the crucified Redeemer, the Suffering Servant, is one with the crucified people. Jon Sobrino introduces his article, "The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today," in this way:

> *Ignacio Ellacuría admired Jürgen Moltmann's well-know book The Crucified God, but he made a point of stressing another much more urgent theological idea:* ***the crucified people****. This was not just for historical reasons (our reality is like this), but also for theological ones (God's creation is like this). It is necessary for us to speak of these crucified peoples in relation to 1992, as well, in order to recall their historical causes. And the sole object of all this talk must be to bring them down from the cross . . .*
>
> *This theology of the crucified peoples has become established in Latin America, whereas in other places it may seem exaggerated, unjustified or unscientific pious language.*[10]

As Janet Ruffing has pointed out so well, Catherine's nineteenth century devotion to the Cross "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."[11] And all of this describes Latin America today.

At this moment in history, a moment of repentance and of celebration, a moment of deep regret for what has been and of commitment to a more just future, we, as women of Mercy are challenged to live out, to struggle with, and to celebrate the multi-cultural, multi-racial, international fabric of our lives. Inspired by Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor we are called to ever deeper solidarity, in life-style and ministry, with a crucified people. And those of us in Latin America are indeed in a privileged, holy place from which, and within which to do this.

Footnotes

1. *Concilium Special: 1492-1992 The Voice of the Victims*, SCM Press, London, 1991, p. 49.

2. *Concilium Special, op. cit.*, p. 88.

3. Malinda Roper, M.M., *Origins*, November 21, 1991, p. 385.

4. In these reflections I am confining myself to Latin America because that is the reality that I now know best. However, much of what I say here may be applied to North America and the Caribbean.

5. The *mestizo* is used here to denote people of mixed blood: *The Spanish conquistador married or raped the conquered Indian. The children born of this union were neither indigenous nor Spanish. Thus began a new race, which had the characteristics of both groups. At first these children had a difficult time; both groups rejected them . . . The Spaniards labeled these children mestizos* . . . Andres G. Guerrero, "La Raza: Product of Two Conquests" in Rethinking Columbus, A Special Issue of Rethinking Schools, Milwaukee, 1991, p. 72.

The word *criolla* is used to denote those born in Latin America of white, European background.

6. Cf. *Concilium Special, op. cit.*

7. Darcy Ribeiro, "The Latin American People", *Concilium Special, op. cit.* p. 21. Malinda Roper, *Origins, op. cit.*

8. Direction Statement, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, General Chapter, Buffalo, July 1991.

9. Unpublished Community Plan, Argentinian Mercy Community, p. 5. 1991.

10. Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today", in *Concilium Special, op. cit.* pp. 120, 122.

11. Janet Ruffing, R.S.M., "Catherine's Spirituality of the Cross", in *The MAST Journal*, Spring 1992, p. 14.

Resources on Columbus Quincentenary

The following resources are listed in *Tapestry* 2 No. 4 (Winter, 1991), published by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, Province of Wichita, Kansas.

RETHINKING COLUMBUS
Essays and resources for teaching about the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas.
Cost: $40.00 plus $2.00 postage
1001 East Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 964-9646

RESPONDING FAITHFULLY TO THE QUINCENTENARY
A study/action packet containing readings for worship service, bibliography, museum exhibit critique, list of organizations planning to observe Columbus Quincentennial.
Cost. $9.00

Racial Justice Working Group/1992
National Council of Churches Prophetic Justice Unit
475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115
(212) 870-2298

CLERGY AND LAITY CONCERNED
A study/action packet which includes essays, stickers, book and video lists, resource guide.
Cost: $8.00
Rediscovering the History of the Americas
CALC, 340 Mead Road, Decatur, GA 30039

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
Packet of information resources for parish activities/handouts and documents on historical rationale for research, reflection and analysis on the 500 years of evangelization in the United States.
Ad Hoc Committee for Observance of the V Centenary of Evangelization of the Americas
3211 4th Street N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS QUINCENTENARY JUBILEE COMMISSION
This is the official US Presidential Commission created in 1984. Ask for free packet which will contain calendar information, projects and list of commissioners.
Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Com.
1801 F. Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL
Quincentennial Discovery Kit including bookmarks, mobiles, charts, etc. Cost: $70.00
Write for free brochure which outlines Discovery Kit
Children's Book Council
P.O. Box 706, New York, NY 10276-0706
(212) 966-1990

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
Write for free brochure listing exhibits and information on traveling exhibits for Quincentenary Seeds of Change
Smithsonian Institution
Constitution Avenue at 10th Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20560 (202) 357-4790

KANSAS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES
Ask for free brochure on special speakers bureau. When Worlds Meet. Speakers examine art, myths, and sacred landscape of Native America, explore the New World through eyes of Coronado and Columbus and other topics related to quincentenary. Speakers bureau available to nonprofit, adult community groups which can guarantee audience of at least 20. Kansas Committe for the Humanities, 112 West Sixth Street, Suite 210, Topeka, KS 66603.

Juan Diego and Catherine McAuley Reflections and Insights

Linda Bechen, RSM

. . . on the morning of Tuesday, December 12, 1531, Juan Diego (rushing to Tlatelolco) came to the hill of Tepeyac where he was approached by the Lady who consoled his anxiety about his uncle's health and told him to go to the top of the hill where he would find roses and told him to take these to the bishop who had requested a sign regarding the Lady and her request to build a temple in her honor (Document, 12-3*)*

The approaching time for profession brought its share of anxiety overclouding the joyous anticipation of the event. Catherine (McAuley) and her companions feared that the chapter nuns (of the Presentation order) would not give a unanimous vote of acceptance . . . Archbishop Murray reassured her and said he would profess her in a private ceremony if necessary . . . (notwithstanding) the ceremony took place on December 12, 1831 and this date marks the foundation of the Sisters of Mercy. (Letters, 32*)*

On April 9, 1990, Juan Diego was elevated to the status of "beatified" within the Church (*Catholic Almanac*, 38). This not only recognizes his status but also continues the cause of canonization and allows private celebrations and devotions to be held in his name. On this same day Catherine McAuley was noted as "venerable". This recognition realizes the beginning stages of canonization and opens this process.

These events are separate and significant in and of themselves, but their similarities are striking. Spanning exactly three hundred years on the date of December 12, 1531 and 1831, we have two events that will have far-reaching consequences. The first was the revelation of the Lady of Guadalupe on the tilma of Juan Diego; the second the foundation of the Sisters of Mercy by Catherine McAuley. The experience of two, simple, ordinary people continues to serve as a focus of energy for thousands.

In this study, I will underscore some of the similarities between the experiences of these two individuals. Especially noted will be the fact that both experiences were associated with the economically poor. With the advent of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, I will reflect on how the Guadalupe experience may speak to this new initiative.

Juan Diego was a poor Indian and it is to him that our Lady chooses to appear. She directly addresses who he is and his status: "Juan, the smallest of my sons" (*Document,* 3). Juan Diego is a product of his environment, an environment made wretched by poverty resulting from the Spanish conquest.

Ravaged by the plunderings of the Spanish for over ten years, the splendor of the Aztec tribe was in ruin. It is important to note that the conquest of the Spanish was based on their military strength, but was not limited to this. Two central factors influenced the Aztec defeat. First, as a people they had become increasingly the target of hatred by other indigenous groups. This was linked to the Aztec belief in human sacrifice which had altered the religion of Quetzalcoatl, the god of the east, who had come to bring a religion of simplicity, human dignity, and prayer (*Elizondo,* 41). The antagonism was compounded by the memory of Quetzalcoatl's promising words that he would return. Large numbers of indigenous people were convinced that the Spaniards were gods and that Cortez was indeed Quetzalcoatl who had come back to redeem his religion (*Elizondo,* 41).

Secondly, the Aztecs believed in omens and this convinced them that the end of their civilization was to be marked in 1517 and 1519. This was realized when Cortez discovered Yucatan in 1517 and in 1519 when he landed in Mexico (*Elizondo,* 41). This factor played on the vulnerability of the Aztecs and made them innocent ploys in the Spanish conquest. Coupled with a belief that the Spanish were gods, destruction was inevitable. The realization, after the massacre at the great temple during the celebration of Toxcatl, that the Spanish were not gods, came too late. The Aztecs themselves became the human sacrifice. Their gods had been defeated and life for them had run out, illustrated through their piercing cry: "Please let us die, let us disappear, for our gods have died" (*Elizondo,* 43).

Everything that the natives had held sacred was ravaged.

Everything that the natives had held sacred was ravaged. "Their gods had been defeated, their temples destroyed, and their women violated" (*Elizondo,* 44). Ten years after this ruination, Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego. She came to him in the midst of his impoverishment and offered him consolation by speaking of the temple which she desired to be build. The temple would be one in which she might "show and bestow all (her) love, compassion, aid, and protection" and one in which (they) may plead and confide in (her) that (she) may hear in it their griefs, and mend all their miseries, pains, afflictions" (*Document,* 3). It was in their midst that she had come to be present and to ease their burden.

Likewise, the Institute that Catherine McAuley founded was based on her experience of the poor and indigent of her day. This experience was rooted early in her life through the example of her father, James McAuley. He often took young Catherine with him as he distributed food and goods to the Irish poor of Dublin. Their home was opened to the poor each Sunday as the elder McAuley instructed the poor in Catholicism. The poor were an integral part of the McAuley home and Catherine was imprinted with a consciousness that the poor needed shelter, education, health care, and jobs. This was underscored when she experience poverty firsthand after the death of her father (*Tender Courage*, 5-7).

Nineteenth century Ireland saw many factors which impacted its social context. A rapidly growing population in need of subsistence was affected by Ireland's proximity to and association with England. The Act of Union created a culture of poverty. In the rural areas people competed for the sparse and meager plots of land, while in the cities unemployment was rampant and was accentuated through overcrowded conditions which were compounded by filth and hunger (*Tender Courage*, 77). It was this immediate experience along with the memory of poverty earlier in her life which gave an impetus to Catherine's mission.

With the financial security and stability from the Callaghan legacy, she opened the first House of Mercy on September 24, 1824 to respond to the needs of poor, single working women. Catherine, however, did not limit the Institute to this segment of the poor. She quickly expanded the works to include the sick and the uneducated. These were needs which were direct results of the poverty of the day. She missioned the ladies of Baggot Street to the streets of Dublin.

The missionaries typically utilized their native translators to communicate their own ideas, rather than learning from the people.

Catherine McAuley believed in ministering to the people in the midst of their daily lives and sent women into the streets. It is also within the context of Juan Diego's experience of poverty that Guadalupe appears and speaks to him. She commissions him with her message in words that recognize his daily struggle . . . "go to the palace . . . and tell (the bishop) . . . I will reward you well and pay you, so that you may be happy and (you) deserve much to recompense . . . all your work and fatigue . . ." (*Document,* 4).

With the advent of the missionaries, we see the message of Christianity being imposed upon the people. The activities of the missionaries often failed to recognize the personhood of the Indians, the faith tradition that was active in their lives, and rituals that expressed their belief. These failures of recognition colored the whole effort of evangelization. What followed was the second conquest of the era — the conquest of Christianity sponsored by Spain, sanctioned by the Vatican, but at the expense of the Aztec culture and religion. The teachings of the Church were paramount while remaining oblivious to the experience of the people. The vast number of converts attests to a different kind of plunder efforts of this conquest which suggests little integration of Christianity with the culture of the people.

The missionaries were hampered by their limited world vision which is especially illustrated by their quick determination that the Aztec human sacrifice was diabolical. They failed to understand its deeper ritualized meaning within the context of the Aztec faith (*Elizondo*, 72).

Even though the missionaries tried to acquire knowledge of the people's customs and were intent on gaining facility with the native languages, a void remained. Their facility in languages did not serve primarily as means of understanding acceptance, but as a means of injecting their ideas and customs into the culture of the Aztecs. The missionaries typically utilized their native translators to communicate their own ideas, rather than learning from the people. "This was a time when Christianity had in some fashion been brought over, but it had not yet been sown. The first heroic efforts were made, but it had not yet been born" (*Elizondo*, 72).

With the appearance of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, we see the seeds of Christianity being born. It is birthed within the context of the natives' experience and is meant to speak to their time and circumstance. I have spoken previously that the Virgin speaks to Juan and recognizes that he is a "poor little Indian" (*Boff*, 2). Guadalupe breaks through the hierarchical chains of Spanish Christianity in the way that she wishes to be addressed. She is not "Notre Dame or Nossa Senhora." She refers to herself as "nina" (child), "Virgencita" (little Virgin), "Muchachita" (little girl), "Hi ja mia meñor" (younger daughter), "Señora" (lady, "Madrecita" (little mother) and "la madre compasiva del pueblo" (the compassionate mother of the people) (*Document,* 5). Guadalupe places herself in the midst of the people and reflects the experience of the people by using phrases of their language to describe herself.

This is also reflected through the location where she reveals herself. It is not in the center of Christianity — the palace of the bishop. Rather, it is from Tepeyac, a place sacred to the Aztec god Thatilolco. Tepeyac is a place at the periphery, and it is from here that she

imparts the truth to Juan Diego whose task it is to take it to the center of Christianity. He is to instruct the bishop from his experience (*Boff*, 3). This is in striking contrast to the missionaries who imported Christianity very authoritatively. The people came to missionaries within their mission compound. Guadalupe encounters Juan Diego on the hill sacred to his culture. The one who has been oppressed by the conquerors is now charged with the monumental task of conveying the message of truth to the evangelizers. "He will not come with violence, but with words and flowers. It is this poetry coupled with the flowers that speak the truth of Guadalupe" (*Boff*, 3).

The image and the mission of Guadalupe reflect a new order which is not imposed by the powerful, but is birthed from the experience of the people.

The image and the mission of Guadalupe reflect a new order which is not imposed by the powerful, but is birthed from the experience of the people. This experience is one which openly dialogues, involves everyone, and invites rather than compels action (*Boff*, 4).

The new Institute of Catherine McAuley was an alternative to the experience of religious life of the nineteenth century. The women of the House of Mercy shared a common bond through their works. Catherine was firmly opposed to the Institute appearing as a convent primarily because of the enclosure that bound the Sisters of her day; the women of Baggot Street could not be encumbered by confinement. She desired that her Sisters be "out and about." Thus the Sisters were endearingly dubbed the "walking Sisters." She believed in the direct involvement of the women with those whom they served. It was important that they "follow the pattern of the Gospel which required love, concern, and care for the person . . . (and to allow the pain that one encountered to enter the woman's heart" (*Tender Courage*, 31).

This direct involvement was not only limited to the people served by the Sisters, but was an intimate and integral dimension of the inner workings of the Institute itself. Important to her were the deep bonds of affection which linked member to member, house to house, and foundation to foundation. This was one of the strengths of the Institute (*Tender Courage*, 43).

Catherine saw many opportunities for growth of the Institute. These lay not only in the area of expansion, but in personal growth as well. The extensive needs challenged the limits of ability to respond (*Tender Courage*, 51). Members soon realized the importance of each person's involvement, participation, and support in carrying out the daily tasks of the foundation. This helped to develop a sense of belonging among members of each foundation. Communication was as critical to community as unity, and her personal letters to each foundation attested to this (*Bolster*, 46). This fostered an important concept for Catherine — a unity of spirit.

Likewise, Guadalupe gathered people together. Even though Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, a poor Indian, that experience was not limited as a private revelation. In him the plight of all could be addressed. As she acknowledged Juan Diego and raised his sense of dignity and self-worth, she appealed to all the native population. *Criollos, mulatos*, Indians, *mestizos* could all identify with her. Her identity was not limited to one particular group, but she assumed the quality and characteristics of each. This unity laid a foundation for the alliance needed later to forge their independence as a nation.

In time, there was a growing hatred for the "Gachupines" (peninsular-born Spaniards). It is the *Gachupines* who are the land owners and control the country. Although they are powerful, they are few in number. The powerless included the *Criollos, milatos, mestizos*, and the Indians who were recovering their numbers after being decimated through epidemics. The powerless grew in numbers and in the desire for a better life. It was this increase, coupled with the strong devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, which fueled their cause for independence. It was Don Miguel Hidalgo, one of the leaders of the early revolution, who declared the peoples' independence by carrying a painting of Guadalupe as a sign of their protection and liberation (*Elizondo*, 110).

The cry for Mexican independence was: "Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe and down with the *Gachupines*" (*Elizondo*, 111). It was a united effort of the Mexican masses which proved to be effective after eleven years on September 21, 1827. Guadalupe gave them meaning, hope, and courage to undertake the impossible task of rising from their powerless state of poverty, and voice their cries against the powerful to bring justice. (*Elizondo*, 112). Guadalupe was then and continues to be the force that keeps the structures of the country together: politically, socially, religiously (*Guerrero*, 134). She is the symbol of identity from which the other elements flow (*Guerrero*, 136).

It was a similar sense of unity which not only strengthened the foundations of Catherine McAuley, but served as a basis for ministry. Reverence for each of her Sister's gifts and talents, while accepting the limitations of each person as a human being, created this unity. Catherine's emphasis on unity went beyond mere tolerance of individual differences. It was rooted in a deep concern for each person. It was her belief that the strength of the Institute was founded in their love of each other, their appreciation of each person's contribution and in the belief of each other's good intentions. This was basic to being a forgiving and reconciling presence not only within the community but to those to whom one ministered. It was her firm belief that the charity elicited by the day-to-day events fostered and strengthened the Institute (*Tender Courage*, 100). It was "out of a loving, forgiving union with one another and out of the learnings that ensued that Sisters of Mercy would be enabled to reach out in compassionate service to others, for mercy is but the overflow of charity" (*Tender Courage*, 101).

"Guadalupe . . . grants (people) the strength (for) what humanly speaking is impossible: for the illiterate, the powerless, the poor, and the oppressed to rise up against the powerful to bring about justice."

It is indeed this spirit of unity which impelled us, as Sisters of Mercy based in the Americas, to forge a moment in our history on July 20, 1991 through a new foundation –- the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. The Institute spans two continents of diverse peoples and cultures, and incorporates over 8,000 members within the charism of Catherine McAuley. One is left with the question about Guadalupe. As we begin this new venture in Mercy can the event of Guadalupe speak to the Institute?

I think that the core of this message lies in Guadalupe as a symbol of liberation. She engaged people in the process of liberation and enkindled hope in the hearts of those shackled by Spanish religiosity and economic conquest. The power of Guadalupe was not limited in time to the event itself but has permeated a culture and a people up to the present. Its power lies not in the externals of the event, but in the power which is stirred within the lives of people. Guadalupe gives "meaning to people and grants them the strength and courage to undertake what humanly speaking is impossible: for the illiterate, the powerless, the poor, and the oppressed to rise up against the powerful to bring about justice" (*Elizondo*, 112). The power of Guadalupe is not found within the confines of a structure of the Church, but is to be found within the church understood as the people of God.

Sisters of Mercy have committed themselves through a fourth vow: service to "the poor, the sick, and uneducated." For 160 years we have eased people's needs through our institutions. In seeking to "respond to the signs of the times" Mercy has undertaken new initiatives while maintaining established works of direct service. The new challenge of the 1990's is this: How does our service assist the process of liberation? How does the Institute itself, regional communities, and the works, reflect and promote liberation? This process involves education, integration, and empowerment. This empowerment is not only for the members but for others.

The directional statement of the Institute hints at this process but does not articulate the intent. This statement impels us to " . . . act in solidarity with the economically poor, women seeking fullness of life and equality . . . and one another (mindful of) our multicultural and international reality" (*Directional statement*, par. 1). It further states that this commitment will impel us to "act from a multi-cultural, international perspective, speak with a corporate voice, work for systemic change, and call ourselves to conversion" (*Directional statement*, par. 2). This statement is framed within the context of Catherine McAuley's "passion for the poor" and animated by the Gospel. The aim of this — liberation — is not stated.

In the Americas, Guadalupe has served as a symbol of liberation. It is this liberation which I believe can speak to the new Institute. The symbol itself does not liberate, but it can be redefined as liberating, provided that the people involved realize this process is going on (*Guerrero*, 146). It gives "credence to the struggle and strengthens the people's faith and hope, and endurance in the on-going process of liberation" (*Guerrero*, 146). Guadalupe was the liberating message of her day. The Institute is to be that message of the 1990"s. Both are to " . . . bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor in the Lord" (*Lk. 4: 18-19*).

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Sueños De Mujeres: Hispanic Women and Ministry

Ana Maria Pineda, RSM

She wanders through the market of dreams. The market women have spread out dreams on big cloths on the ground.

Juana's grandfather arrives at the market, very sad because he has not dreamed for a long time. Juana takes him by the hand and helps him select dreams, dreams of marzipan or of cotton, wings to fly with in sleep, and they take off to gather so loaded down with dreams that no night will be long enough for them.[1]

Women have played an important role in maintaining the dreams of a people. Throughout the centuries the conquered women and their daughters never lost the ability to wander through the market of dreams. While the commemoration of the quincentennial recalls the destruction of a people, it also signals the persistent spirit of the mestizo women of these lands to conquer their devastated past, and to build the present.

The present moment of history is being shaped by U.S. Hispanic women in their struggle to obtain greater participation in Church ministries. It is perhaps most apparent in the experience of hispanic women who are married to permanent deacons.[2] Who are these women? What has been their involvement in the required formation programs for the diaconate? What types of ministries do they exercise? What are their dreams, and how do these dreams challenge present forms of ministry?

Wives of the U.S. Hispanic Permanent Deacons

Who are these women? The profile that emerges is that of women who, contrary to popular belief, in great number were born in the U.S. (49.6%). Others were born in other countries (50.4%) outside of the U.S. The majority (88.9%) of the wives are U.S. citizens. The medium age is 54 years. The majority (40.9%) hold non-Church full-time employment. Only 4.5% are employed full-time in Church affiliated positions. Another 6.4% are employed part-time by the Church. Generally, the salary received either in secular employment or Church related employment is low ($10,000 - $15,000).

A significant percent of the wives are Democrats (68.7%). They participated actively in the last presidential election (89.1%) by exercising their right and responsibility to vote. The majority of them (67.7%) voted in the last presidential election for the democratic presidential candidate. A great number of the wives hold the belief that faith should influence their political choices and decisions (81.2%); a belief held only by 61.4% of their husbands.

The educational level of the wives reveals that the greater number (34.4%) graduated from high school, and that only 22.1% of the women have college/university level studies. Few of the women have an M.A. degree (4.9%) and even fewer have a doctoral degree (0.8%).

Wives' level of participation in diaconal formation programs:

Not all the wives have participated in the deacon formation programs, but those who did participate (54.9%) found the programs generally beneficial (75.3%). The formation they received through these programs was important to them in the work place (50%), and even a greater number of the wives (81.4%) considered that the formation helped them in their ministries. While more than half of the wives (56.3%) felt that the programs prepared them adequately to face the reality of being a wife of a deacon, nevertheless, a good number of them still desire more formation.

Present ministry involvement:

The revised directives (1984) for the formation and ministry of the permanent diaconate dedicates an entire chapter to the aspects of married and family life of the permanent deacon. The directives state: "Even though it is clearly understood from the outset that the wife is not to be ordained, nevertheless her marriage and family are truly involved."[3] The importance of the wife is verified in the findings of a 1981 national study of the permanent diaconate.[4] In part, the results of the study demonstrate unquestionably the role of the wife in contributing to the degree of success experienced by the husband in the exercise of the diaconal ministry. However, it would be an injustice to reduce the wives' exercise of ministry to this companion role. Attention must be given to the women's own appropriation of ministry and to the types of ministry in which they engage.

There is an impressive variety in the ministries that these hispanic women carried out. "For twenty years, we have knocked on doors in different areas and neighborhoods in our diocese trying to form small ecclesial communities."[5] "I am a minister of the Word and of the Eucharist. In addition, I am a member of our parish council, and belong to a parish evangelization team." Others see their work as a ministry: "My ministry is through my job as a teacher in a *barrio* school. My time and energies are spent in offering these children the chance to know they are special and

can do well in school and in their lives." There are women actively involved in Social Justice Commissions, community organizing efforts and still others work with separated spouses in the capacity of annulment advocates. These areas of human need open the horizons of the ministries which these wives engage in, but there are other areas of ministry to which they have limited access.

Women by virtue of their non-ordained status find little room in sacramental forms of ministry, i.e., preaching, baptism, witnessing of marriage. Their participation in this area is limited to preparing others for the sacrament of reconciliation, confirmation and the catecumenate (RCIA). In some parishes they prepare engaged couples for matrimony.

What is a treasured dimension of the ministry of the diaconate is in fact exercised to a greater degree by a substantial percent of the deacons' wives.

Ironically, this limitation has offered the wives the opportunity to excel in what has traditionally been one of the most treasured ministries of the deacon in the early Church — the ministry of charity.

The first century writer of the Church, while they underscored the importance of the ministry of the deacons, also profoundly explained the multiple and delicate funciones which were entrusted to them in the christian communities and how much they contributed to the apostolate. The Diaconate is defined as the 'ear, the heart and the soul of the bishop' (Didascalia Apostoloru, II, 44, 4).[6]

In our day, Paul VI in *Ad Pascendum*, sees permanent deacons as interpreters of the needs and the desires of the christian communities.[7]

The deacon should be above all else, by the grace and the charism of his ordination, a man particularly sensitive to all the necessities of his brothers (sisters) in the community and in the world. He will be constantly attentive to the ever changing needs of the society in order to awaken in christians an ever new response.[8]

The German Bishops reiterate this while stressing the following: "But, above all, they seek contact with the alienated, they make note of their concerns to the Church and attempt to awaken in all the community a preoccupation for this group."[9]

What is a treasured dimension of the ministry of the diaconate is in fact exercised to a greater degree by a substantial percent of the deacons' wives.[10] The wives spend their time in visiting the sick; reaching out to parishioners; visiting those in prison; attending wakes and offering consolation to the grieving; accompanying troubled marriage partners; providing shelter, food, clothing to the needy. These achievements stand out in marked contrast to their husbands who dedicate the majority of their ministry time to assisting at Eucharist and preparing their homilies.

Sueños de Mujeres

These women have inherited the "dreams of marzipan or of cotton" of their ancestors, the Juana's, of the *Conquista* and of many lands. They have not lost the ability to dream. They dream of being recognized by a Church who bears the name of "Madre."

These dreams are passionately expressed in their own words. These words voice their dreams to extend their ministry to the alienated and afflicted:

I would like to visit the jails. And also preach the word of God to all those in prison. After all, it is the Lord's command to preach his holy word to all. . . . I would like to work in the ministry of the dying, and to assist in making arrangements for their burial. Due to health, I cannot have children. I would like to start a ministry for other women who share my situation. It seems that the Church ignores persons who find themselves in similar situations.[11]

I would like to help youth in their needs in these days of difficulty; give counsel to marriages in trouble. . . . I would like to work with alienated catholics . . . Visit immigrants . . . Do missionary work with the poor . . . Participate in catechizing small groups.

While the overwhelming number of women do not seek ordination to the diaconate,[12] what is clear is the dream that they have to be recognized with human dignity. Their poignant words reveal some of their present experience:

We still have priests in this diocese who do not recognize or accept deacons. I feel that this rejection also extends to the wives.

I see my husband suffer the contempt and the indifference with which they treat the deacons; the rejections are continuous. There is a lack of spiritual direction and continuing formation. The absence of the most minimal courtesy in treating deacons does not encourage me to become part of this. If they treat deacons with this lack of regard, what would they do to the wives?

I think that I would feel more comfortable in doing the work of the Church, if they would recognize my husband as a deacon, and not reject him because he is hispanic. At times even the hispanic priests do not want deacons.

I would like to see a Church which would recognize the values of the hispanic community. For example, recognize the fact that they (hispanics) are capable of being disciples of Christ, and not

just merit it based on imposition.

Their dreams seek greater solidarity with women like themselves . . . seeking greater identity as women who are at the same time hispanic.

> *There should be greater emphasis on the important role that one has as the wife of the deacon. I think that a support group should exist for the wives where they can share their problems. The community looks toward the wives and at times it is difficult to be oneself. We lose our identity because we are recognized as the wives of the deacons.*
>
> *(An aspect that needs to be given greater attention in formation programs as it relates to the wives of the deacons) Reality! This aspect is not studied well. Not only as it relates to the wives, their families and their communities, but it also should concern the deacon candidate.*

Another identity issue for these women is the validity of their own ministry:

> *I think it should be more clearly stated that the wife does not have to be involved directly with the husband or within the Church building itself in order to be ministering to God's people. My own ministry is out of the structural Church. . . . I don't minister with my husband. I am my own person (with my) likes and dislikes. I prefer other areas of service . . . The wife should be screened as an individual person and not as a wife of a deacon. . . (There is a need for a formation) program that would help the wife discover her own ministry and giftedness.*

Their future dreams about ministry involve the organization of hispanic leadership; developing base communities for the Spanish-speaking; the preaching of the Word in liturgical settings; the creation of husband and wife ministry teams; teaching the Scriptures to others and working with the elderly and the marginalized.

They dream about returning to college to better prepare themselves for ministry. They dream about having the opportunities to continue their theological education. Some have taken steps in acquiring more education in working toward acquiring Bachelor Degrees, and degrees in pastoral ministry. A few even dream of the possibility of being accepted in the Church as women deacons.

Challenge for ministry

The wives of the deacons present a challenge to the Church. Their presence and involvement in ministry is a constant reminder to the Church of the need to further the recognition of women in: 1) the present design of deacon formation programs; 2) the exercise of ministries and their valuable role in those ministries; 3) the creation of new models of ministry; 4) providing extensive theological and pastoral preparation; 5) providing the wives of deacons with adequate ways of dealing with the challenge of the diaconate. While these hispanic women did not express great personal interest in seeking ordination to the diaconate, nevertheless, that does not eliminate the interest of a few nor the duty of crediting them with studies earned through their participation in the deacon formation programs. Essentially, these women stand as a constant challenge to the Church to consider anew the inclusive nature of ministry, and the equal recognition of the baptized in the life of the Church.

The centuries following the *Conquista* have shattered past realities once belonging to thriving indigenous civilizations, but they have not conquered Juana's ability to dream, to "select dreams, dreams of marzipan or of cotton, to sprout wings to fly with in sleep, strengthened by a treasury of dreams so enduring and plentiful no night will be long enough for them."

Footnotes

1. Galeano, Eduardo, *Memory of Fire: Genesis,* translated by Cedric Belfrage, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, p. 239.

2. Findings are based on the results of a sample survey completed with wives of U.S. Hispanic Deacons.

3. Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines on their formation and ministry, Publications Office United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1985, p. 41, No. 110.

4. *A National Study of the Permanent Diaconate in the United States,* commissioned by the Bishop's Committee on the Permanent Diaconate for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCC, Washington, D.C., 1981.

5. Words of hispanic women describing their present ministry involvements. The quotes that follow express other ministries exercised by these women.

6. T.J. Shugrue, *Service Ministry of the Deacon,* United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, D.C., 1988, 23.

7. J. Urdeix, (dir.), *Diaconos para la comunidad,* Centro de Pastoral Litúgica, Barcelona 1979, 25.

8. J. Urdeix, ed., *Conclusiones del I Encuentro Internacional sobre el Diaconado en Diáconos para la Comunidad,* Centro de Pastoral Litúrgica, Barcelona 1979, 34.

9. T.J. Shugrue, op. Cit., 39.

10 This is a conclusion based on my study of the issue.

11. I have translated comments made by hispanic women who are wives of hispanic permanent deacons. In the body of this work, I will use a number of similar quotes from the same source.

12. Only two of the women expressed explicit interest in either the personal possibility of the diaconate for themselves or for women.

The New Evangelization and the Challenge of Fundamentalism

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM

In this year of 1992, I am reflecting on the continuing mission of evangelization in the new world in light of my location at one of the early California outposts of evangelization. Santa Clara University occupies the site of a mission originally established by Junipero Serra in 1777. We could say that the original mission to this part of the new world has achieved an unimagined success. A former third world culture has now, two centuries later, achieved transformation as a showcase of first world accomplishments in the heart of California's Silicon Valley.

. . . we are experiencing a polarization between liberal and conservative approaches to the interpretation of scripture . . .

My task is easier than the first missionaries. In some respects it shares a similarity, because knowledge is not genetically transmitted. It has to be relearned in each generation; and that means starting from scratch. I sometimes think the technological revolution has done little to affect the basic condition of the human mind: when confronted with complexity, it seeks simplicity. When overloaded with data, it chooses to reduce rather than enlarge the parameters; when confronted with the burden of choice-making and lonely analysis, it prefers allegiance to an authority. One task of evangelization that impresses me as particularly urgent, besides the feminist agenda, is the need to confront simplistic analysis of scripture, challenge fundamentalist reductionism, and crack the "tapes" that substitute coded formulas for the inquiry of genuine faith. In spite of all the advances made in biblical scholarship the past twenty-five years, we are experiencing a polarization between liberal and conservative approaches to the interpretation of scripture, even within the Catholic Church.[1] This trend that leans to the right rather than the left affects old as well as young. Professors of religious studies the last five or six years will typically say that they find their students "more conservative" than they themselves are.

My task, as a New Testament professor, is to teach the scripture at least six times a week, not to the indigenous peoples, but to the melting pot of twentieth century American students who represent the racial diversity of California. Recently in an undergraduate course on Pauline Letters and Theology, we were discussing Paul's views on sexuality. Passages touching the subject occur in I Corinthians 7, where Paul discusses the mutuality characterizing the sexual relations of spouses, the matter of re-marriage, divorce or separation in cases of a spouse who becomes a convert, pros and cons of marrying in the first place, the gift of remaining single and celibate after widowhood, and a father's authority over marriageable daughters. He also treats as a factor in sexual relations the matter of prayer, and dedication of the heart to the Lord.

Then we began to discuss Paul's condemnation of homosexual practices associated with mediterranean cults in the first century in the context of Ro 1:23-32. Several students in the class disagreed with my proposal that perhaps this particular passage in Romans didn't say all there was to say about the situation of gay and lesbian persons in American society today. I cited Professor Lisa Sowle Cahill of Boston College, a laywoman who has proposed that sensitive ethical issues such as homosexuality be discussed within a four-fold framework that includes not only scripture and traditional formulations of doctrine, but the human experience of believers and the results of empirical research in the human sciences.[2] Students said, "Well, Paul said this is a sin, and anyone who chooses homosexuality is condemned."

I then told them the story of an admirable man I used to teach with, dedicated to Catholic schools, living on subsistence pay for 20 years, a support to his men and women colleagues, and a wonderful teacher and administrator. I felt his death from AIDS left a big irreplaceable hole in that institution. I asked the class, "How do you think God judges this man's life and contribution to Catholic education?" A student said, "God calls him to repent of his sin, and if he repents, he can be forgiven." I suggested that perhaps there were other views of this man's life than the one implied by Paul's condemnation in Romans 1:23-32.

Then one female student well versed in the rhetoric of "sola scriptura" (scripture alone), turned to the last chapter of the Book of Revelation and read out loud: *I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words in this book: if anyone adds to them God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words in this prophetic book, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city described in this book* (Rev. 22:18-19).

I turned with a smile and said to her, "Well, it looks like I'm in trouble, is that what you are saying?" She nodded a solemn, self-assured Yes. The following

class, taking up the pose of Joan of Arc, I playfully held my hands behind my back, and joked a bit, in order to get discussion going. "Last class, I was about to be burned at the stake. Won't anyone rescue me?" One student, just as playfully, made a gesture of throwing a lighted match at me. "Well," I said, "The message is clear. I guess this is it. Burn, baby burn!"

The anecdote illustrates the logical conclusion of policies generated by a "sola scriptura" approach not only to moral issues, but to expressions of cultural diversity within the human as well as Christian community. As we reexamine the effect of 500 years evangelization in the new world, we become aware that certain effects, for good and for ill, inevitably flow from a community's interpretation of its scripturally-based mission, and the hermeneutic or interpretive system that governs that interpretation and application to contemporary life. Scriptural texts, of course, are simply words on a page until they are interpreted.[3]

Scriptural texts . . . are simply words on a page until they are interpreted.

Each of us also operates with a "canon within a canon." Rather than the whole bible, parts of scripture inspire our reflections and actions. We are familiar with this dynamic when we make a retreat. There are certain passages which are a "canon within the canon" for a time of seeking God's consolation in prayer. When we read an episcopal document, we also recognize that some scripture passages are chosen as a reference point rather than others. This alerts us to the "convenience" or "inconvenience" of references to the creation accounts in Genesis 1-3, the relation of men to women in the post-Pauline epistles, or texts about Mary in Matthew and Luke's infancy narratives.[4]

Evangelization inspired by a biblical vision has been grounded in specific passages that often set the tone for pastoral ministry in a given historical period. The church's history provides us with examples of heroic action undertaken in fulfillment of Christ's mission to preach the gospel in lands far from one's native place. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 25:19). Such was the religious aim of missionaries to the new world in the 1500's. That same passage assumes a different tone when it is read against a post-Vatican II consciousness of respect for the religious traditions of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.[5]

What we recognize now are the effects of interpreting this Matthean text as an expression of triumphalism reflecting a sense of European cultural superiority over the "pagan" culture of the tribes of the new world. More recent perspective on faith development acknowledges that the very content of belief, as a result of cognitive processing, differs from culture to culture. Schreiter, for example, proposes that cross-cultural similarities should be sought in cognitive processing, rather than in the content of belief.[6]

Communication of the faith in western, european culture often operated under a familiar military metaphor. To be a missionary was to conquer the world for Christ.[7] Saving souls meant defeating the enemy and rescuing them from the demon of pagan worship. The violence decried in the human sacrifices of indigenous peoples was actually replicated, we would now say, by the violence done to a people's entire language and culture when it was "ennobled" and replaced by Christianity.

The paradoxical result of the missionary enterprise is this: the cultural heritage of the Mayans and Aztecs was simultaneously preserved and destroyed by the same missionary activity. In his historical study *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other,* Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes the missionaries who were interested in communication of the faith through education, from the conquistadors who were motivated by the acquisition of wealth. To the credit of the missionaries, they were the first to actually learn the language of the conquered people of Mexico. For example, by 1536, the Franciscan, Sahagún, had learned Nahuatl, and taught Latin to the sons of Mexican noblemen. His publications reflect "an intermediary role between the two cultures," and in his chosen role as a bridge between two worlds, he both presented Christian culture to the Indians, as well as described native culture of the Nahuatl for the benefit of the Spaniards.[8]

The dual role of a woman who acted as the translator for Cortés, conqueror of Mexico, also illustrates the new world of culture which emerged when languages intersected. Dona Marina, known as "La Malinche," was a native woman who spoke Nahuatl, of the Aztecs, but also conversed in Mayan. When she learned Spanish, she could accomplish a cultural conversion, interpreting for Cortés not only the words but the actions of the Indians. Despite the reality of her subjugation, and the opinion, even today, that she incarnated the betrayal of indigenous values, Todorov sees in "La Malinche" an image of the evolving character of civilization. She represents the cross-fertilization of cultures. Not only did she herald the modern state of Mexico, but "the present state of us all, since if we are not invariably bilingual, we are inevitably bi-or tri-cultural."[9]

What, we might ask, would have been the difference in the new world if missionaries had measured their success by the mandate of the judgment parable at the end of Matthew? "When did we see you a

stranger . . . naked . . . ill . . . in prison?" In the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25:31-46), no mention is made of the culture, language, degree of education or religious denomination of either the givers or receivers of compassionate help. The history of the missionary ventures into the new world contains stories of compassion as well as exploitation.

Todorov discusses the polar opposite of Cortés, the Dominican missionary Las Casas, who loved the Indians and pressed their cause for just treatment and protection from abuse by the economically rapacious conquistadors. At the same time, his aim was to draw all the Indians, not by violence but through persuasion, to the true religion, Christianity. In spite of his sympathy for their suffering, his ultimate goal was to baptize them and gain their souls for God. This ambiguity, nevertheless, does not diminish the fact that he protested against reduction of the Indians to slavery, and indeed, released his own.[10]

We can more easily understand the ambiguity between compassion for suffering and yet zeal for baptizing if we place the missionary enterprise within what I would call a "fundamentalist hermeneutic." The rise of historical criticism, a hermeneutic or interpretive approach which challenges fundamentalist thinking, is quite recent in European thought, about 150 years old. In what can be termed a "pre-critical" scriptural era, texts were not historicized or contextualized within the socio-political conditions prevailing in a given century thousands of years earlier. In many ways, the New Testament served as a series of "proof-texts" for doctrinal formulations about the existence of God, and the superiority of Christianity over all other belief systems.

Since Vatican II, there has been an effort by Catholic scripture scholars to rethink the meaning of revelation, inerrancy and inspiration.

According to such a doctrine, "proved" by scripture, the Catholic Church was the only faith community legitimated by God's will, successor to a Judaism which was now superceded by the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Free-floating passages of scripture could be cited as proofs for arguments over doctrine and the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. [11] We now assess the effects and repent of the consequences the zeal-driven evangelization of former centuries wreaked on defenseless communities, both in Europe and the new world.

In no small measure this scholarship has been generated by the realization that a fundamentalist, supercessionist[12], non-historical approach to scripture eventually issues in physical violence to people whose faith perspective is rooted in another cultural tradition or another hermeneutic. The same impulse to preach to the gospel to all nations that launched a mission to the new world drove the unconverted Jews from Christian Spain in 1492, from Portugal, Sicily and Sardinia in 1496-7, from Naples in 1541, and from the Papal State in 1593. I was trying to illustrate the inevitability of that trajectory leading from a fundamentalist hermeneutic to the burning of a "heretic" at the stake when I joked with my class about the interpretation of Pauline theology.

The alternative to a fundamentalist hermeneutic is what I will call an historical-critical hermeneutic. "Historical" means that the reading of scripture is done with acknowledgment of the cultural and social conditions that contextualized the writing of the gospels by the evangelists and distinguish their moment in history from our own. "Critical" means that scripture, because it is a written document, follows the conventions of any text: it must be interpreted. Further, that interpretation will yield a variety of meanings. Assumptions about what a text of scripture means will be conditioned by a variety of factors which include biases of the interpreter, gender of the interpreter, historical moment, and expectations about the role outside authorities have in determining a meaning which will be normative for the community.

I think the task for evangelists today involves a confrontation with inter-locked systems of interpretation, not merely single tenets. Some of the differences, as I encounter them in the first world, are outlined here. The distinctions concern the use of scripture made by television evangelists of Protestant or non-denominational affiliations, as well as by Catholics.

Fundamentalist Hermeneutic

1. Faith is propositional, an assent to certain fundamental truths. What God says in scripture is all that is needed for believers. Jesus died for my sins, saved me from damnation, and when I declare him my personal savior, I will be saved. Baptism is the expression of assent to the truth. Faith is belief in the truth. To have faith means to have the certainty of salvation.

2. The true church or community of believers is composed of people who hold the same truths as the authoritative preacher of Christianity, and don't deviate from God's word in scripture as that is interpreted by the magisterium.

3. Tradition is like teeth. What a believer acquires at an early age is meant to last all one's life, the more intact the better.

4. All of scripture is directly God's word of revelation, and God speaks the truth for all historical periods, cultures and peoples. What scripture means at the literal level is clear to the ordinary believer. All of

scripture is harmonious, and passages written 3,000 years ago are no different from pages written 2,000 years ago. What a passage meant then is the same as what the passage means now. Christ is the same "yesterday, today and forever" as far as doctrinal definitions go.

5. What a person should do can be proved from individual texts of scripture, no matter where the passage comes from. Scripture alone is sufficient as a guide to solving contemporary moral and ethical problems, refuting doubt, and setting the terms for conversion.

6. God is the authority, omniscient and powerful, who will judge the people according to their faith in his word and obedience to his commands, as those are communicated by leaders in the church.

7. Good Christians never make mistakes about what God's word means when they rely on scripture. Faith means never being wrong about what God wills for other people, what sin is, and who will be judged good and bad, saved and damned.

Historical Critical Hermeneutic

1. Faith is an inquiry, full of questions and uncertainties about the real meaning of God's will and God's word. Certainty lies in God's benevolence and respect for human freedom. The integrity of faith is measured by compassion for those in need. Faith involves critical thinking, and ability to live with ambiguity and process.

2. The church includes all sorts of difference. Pluralism seems to be God's will.[13] God loves all people as those created in the divine image. God has mysterious ways with human beings who seek the holy one through a variety of spiritual paths.

3. Tradition is like cells in the body, always renewing and regenerating themselves as the person grows.

4. All of scripture is a human mediation of God's word, which must be understood within the conditions of historical periods, cultural biases and political-social perspectives before it can be "applied" to today. Scripture has many levels of meanings, literal and metaphorical. Care must be taken to identify the literary form of the passage. Scriptural passages often conflict with one another.

5. "Proof-texting" is an inadequate approach to complex moral problems of the twentieth century. Scripture and tradition often have something to say to issues, but these must be accompanied by data from the experience of the human community as well as scientific discovery.

6. God is the revealer who astonishes us by a divine humility, an incarnation which entrusts what is divine into human hands.

7. History indicates that even well-meaning believers have made tragic mistakes in their interpretation of scripture, causing untold suffering and injustice to other people in the name of God's word.

I do not know whether my students in Pauline Theology will allow me to live or insist that I be burned. All I know is that by one hermeneutic my chances of continuing life as a feminist theologian are slim; but according to the second, my chances of starting another academic year are better.

Footnotes

1. For an analysis of broader trends which inevitably affect the interpretation of scripture, see Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, "The Unholy Alliance Between the Right and the Left in the Catholic Church," *America* 166/15 (May 2, 1992), pp. 376-382.

2. See Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Gender Roles: The Bible and Beyond," in *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 83-104.

3. See the discussion of interpretation in Sandra Schneiders, "Scripture: Tool of Patriarchy or Resource for Transformation?" in *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991, pp. 37-71. See also her discussion of interpretation and the difference between two criteria for knowledge about scripture: authoritative teaching and critical investigation of scripture itself in *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), pp. 17-24.

4. It is interesting to observe the reduction of scripture references and "proof-texts" in the most recent version of the pastoral on women, when compared with the previous two versions. See "Third Draft of U.S. Bishops' Proposed Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society: Called to Be One In Christ Jesus," *Origins* 21 (April 23, 1991), pp. 761-776.

5. See "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (*Nostra Aetate*, 28 October, 1965) in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. by Austin Flannery, rev. ed. (New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 738-749.

6. A new missionary outlook which attempts to reconcile fidelity to the task of evangelization yet respect for cultures is discussed by Robert J. Schreiter, "Anthropology and Faith: Challenges to Missiology," *Missiology* 19 (July, 1991), pp. 283-293. See in the same issue Paul G. Hiebert, "Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism," PP. 263-281.

7. This metaphor suggesting the energy needed for preaching the faith also served to describe a person's spiritual life. As those familiar with Jesuit spirituality know, the second week of the Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola proposes a "meditation on the two kingdoms" in which one chooses to fight on the side of Christ, whose generalship rivals that of the enemy general, Satan (Exx 136-48). See my critique of this metaphor in "Women and the Exercises: Sin, Standards and New Testament Texts," *The Way Supplement* 70 (Spring, 1991), pp. 21-26.

8. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Translated from the French by Richard Howard (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982, 1984), pp. 220-221. It should be noted that Todorov's volume contains a valuable bibliography of primary sources about Columbus, Aztec society, Cortés, and the conquest of the new world. See pp. 254-264.

9. *Ibid*, pp. 100-101.

10. *Ibid*, pp. 147-182. This section discusses Las Casas' conflicts with Cortés, and his preference for the solution to the conflict over settlement of the Indians to be managed by the missionaries, not the soldiers. See the new translation of Bartolomé de las Casas *The Only Way* in the Sources of American Spirituality series, edited by Helen Rand Parish and translated by Francis Patrick Sullivan, S.J. (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992).

11. See Dianne Bergant, "Fundamentalist and the Bible," *New Theology Review* 1/2 (May, 1988), pp. 36-50. She relies on James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Westminster, 1978). The same issue of NTR has five other articles on the theme of fundamentalism.

12."Supercessionism" is the term describing the triumphalist attitude of Christians toward Jews which dismisses the OT and Judaism as "replaced" by the NT and Christianity. The "new Israel" is the Church, according to this theological interpretation.

13. The expression, "Pluralism is the will of God," is attributed to the late Abraham J. Heschel who was speaking before a group of Roman Catholics. It is quoted by Emil Fackenheim in *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (New York: Collier, 1987), p. 29.

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One Thing Only is Necessary

Address Presented to the Baltimore Regional Community Chapter
January 24, 1992

By Margaret A. Farley, RSM

I have thought a lot about what I might share with you here today. There is so much we all have to ponder now about our life together and our shared mission, about our place in the church and in the world, and our situation before God. There have been so many important analyses offered that help us to interpret our experience, our past and our future (I think for example, of Marie Augusta Neal's work over the years, of the work of Mary Jo Leddy, Patricia Wittberg, Sandra Schneiders, of our own sisters who have provided theological, psychological, and sociological analyses as we try to make sense of our possibilities and our call.) All of these and many others raise questions and provide recommendations that I could incorporate explicitly into what I say now.

In the end, however, I found myself entitling my comments with the biblical saying, "One thing only is necessary." (Luke 10:42) But in a way that title is my conclusion, not my starting point, so let me begin with many things. I shall try first to share with you some fairly brief considerations organized around the three commitments at the heart of the Direction Statement from the Institute General Chapter. I shall then offer two further considerations organized in relation to the biblical texts, (1) "Can you drink the cup?" (Matthew 20:22, Luke 10:38) and (2) "Put your finger here, and see my hands; put your hand into my side; doubt no longer, but believe." (John 20:27)

I. "We commit our lives and resources"

A. To the Economically Poor

In the voice of the General Chapter, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas committed our lives and resources for the next four year to act in solidarity with the *economically poor of the world* (with particular alignment with women and children). To members of some regional communities this could seem like a "ho hum" commitment, not because it is unimportant but because it has been made many times before. And yet, as I experienced it in the context of the chapter, it held surprising grace. And now, in retrospect, I believe it holds new challenges, greater than any we have seen before.

So first, the surprising grace: The decision to include this commitment in the Direction Statement came peacefully and forcefully, as I remember it. This was not because all the regional communities had worked it through previously (though, of course, many had). I think, rather, it was because of the impact of Sister Bette Moslander's opening address to the chapter, in which she articulated simply yet utterly convincingly the historical centrality of Catherine McAuley's commitment to the poor. Grace sometimes comes from surprising sources, and here it came from a Vatican-appointed representative to our Chapter; an emissary who, like Jesus, came over to the side of those she was sent to serve. As she spoke of this clear, even obvious, commitment in the very foundation of our community, I sensed that most of the difficulties the Chapter might have faced in its regard were already laid to rest. And so it proved to be.

. . . now more than ever we must live and be in solidarity with the economically poor.

In the six months since the decision of the Chapter, we have perhaps all had occasion to reflect on this particular commitment in sobering ways. I can best express what I mean by this by referring to Gregory Baum's analysis of the signs of this time in the final issue of *The Ecumenist.*[1] As he indicates, the church first glimpsed the importance of a "preferential option for the poor" in the decade of the 1960s. Those were the days of cultural optimism — the time of Vatican II, the civil rights movement, the anti-colonial struggles in what we then began to call the third world, the movements for economic and political liberation in Latin America. Those were the days of biblical prophecy, of new understandings of the demands of discipleship, of belief in the possibility of changing society to greater justice even in our own generation. In our own community, the 1970s and the early 80s were key, as our faith and love generated along with many others in the church a new impulse to social solidarity with the poor and the powerless. We even entered in many ways into a new spirituality — experiencing God "as the light that made people discover the nature of their bondage and the life that enabled them to assume responsibility for their social existence."[2] Spiritual surrender to God took on political meaning, and we engaged in activities previously unthinkable in our life in community.

Now, says Baum, this period is over. Now our time is scarred by the Gulf War and its aftermath, the turn to neo-conservative exclusive reliance on free market mechanisms, the disillusionment with labor unions, the turning away from welfare programs. Even the ending of the cold war (a good and welcome event in itself) has unleashed disturbing international processes fueled by unchecked capitalist interests, and it has brought new and for some peoples terrible forms of chaos. In our own country we experience growing unemployment and general economic decline, and cities whose problems of crime and drugs are a microcosm of the new international order.

We may say that now more than ever we must live and be in solidarity with the economically poor. But if we do so, we shall have to do it without the cultural and religious optimism of the last 25-30 years. We can no longer see ourselves as marching out of Egypt in a painful but successful exodus with the powerless and the poor, approaching the Promised Land. To commit ourselves and our resources in solidarity with the poor now includes dwelling in the wilderness, walking in the desert, where "mourning and lamentations have their place,"[3] even while hope must be sustained against hope.

The sisters at the General Chapter who came from third world nations, particularly Latin America, tried to tell us this, I think. They said that their efforts for liberation, their standing with the poor, were no longer dedicated primarily to efforts at systemic change (for they had learned both the unrealism of this and its dangers for the poor), but rather, to walking with, companioning, their sisters and brothers who are poor. Our final Direction Statement still commits us to "speak with a corporate voice," and to "work for systemic change," because those of us who still have power must do what the powerless cannot do. And yet we are *all* chastened in our optimism, so that if we are to remain faithful to this commitment we must fuel it with *theological* hope and extend it to a long journeying. *That* is the challenge of this aspect of the Direction we have chosen.[4]

B. To Women

But the second aspect of our direction, our second commitment (to *women seeking fullness of life and equality* in church and society) combines well with the first. It seemed to me that this commitment did not come as peacefully as the first — not surprisingly, perhaps, since fewer regional communities had previously addressed it, and there was not time at the Chapter to clarify different meanings of feminism or different ideologies present within the Chapter membership. Nonetheless, the commitment was made, and it was made wholeheartedly, I believe. What it will mean is even less clear than the unfolding meaning of the first.

Let me begin my brief reflections on this part of the Direction Statement by calling to mind something that happened at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Australia in February of last year. You may have noticed stories in the press about reactions to the keynote address given by Chung Hyun Kyung. What was called a "firestorm" of criticism was directed at Dr. Chung, as she was accused of syncretism, labeled unorthodox, not sufficiently Christological, etc., in the theology of the Spirit that she developed in this address. Yet, as Francine Cardman reports, "many people, especially those from the so-called 'third world' and especially women, found the reality of their lives validated in Dr. Chung's moving presentation. In the commotion following her speech, a women remarked to her that she really ought to be in the women's room at that moment rather than on the assembly floor. When she asked why, she was told that she should see how many women were there crying — in gratitude, relief and joy."[5]

To stand in solidarity with women is to find oneself often in a community of persons so fully one that its tears . . . are as one fountain of life.

To stand in solidarity with women is to find oneself often in a community of persons so fully one that its tears — whether of joy or of sadness — are as one fountain of life. And yet the women's movement in this country has, like so many other movements, come upon hard times. Even as it grows by leaps and bounds around the world, particularly in Africa, Latin America, Central America, and parts of Asia, the backlash is sometimes more evident in North America than the movement itself. There are many reasons for this, of course, not the least of which is the ongoing "horizontal violence" among women, and the developments in the sex industry here as well as internationally.

To stand with women, then, will mean in some ways also to walk in the wilderness. It will mean to share tears, perhaps, but also to bear together the rage of those who do not understand those tears. Once, when Jesus addressed women as a group, he said simply, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but rather for yourselves and for your children." (Luke 23:28) With these words Jesus pointed far beyond any one event; he pointed to the suffering of all persons, and especially women, to the power and oppression that cause desolation again and again, to the shattering of human lives, the deep piercing of individuals' hearts by swords of sorrow, the violence pressed against groups and whole societies, the long anguish of emptiness of individual spirits, the disease and diminishment that attacks persons and cultures.[6]

Women tend to know a lot about weeping. They know that there are at least two kinds of tears. There are tears of desolation, which, when they have been shed, leave the well dry. But there are also tears which

water our hearts and give us strength, which turn us not in on ourselves but out to others, which can wash us all the way to the river of action. To stand in solidarity with women today means, at least in part, to weep tears of the latter kind.

There is a movement among women (however it has waned and waxed) — a movement which has as its goal the full humanity of women, and the common good ultimately of women and men. Within this movement there has emerged a rather clear understanding of the connections between discrimination on the basis of gender and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Hence, to stand with women is to stand with others who are oppressed or exploited, sometimes doubly and triply so.

We can understand and commit ourselves to all of this just as other women do. We can bring to bear in our commitment our institutional and communal resources, and we can participate as individuals in this movement. All of this hardly needs comment (at least not from me today). Yet I want briefly to point to possibilities intrinsic to this commitment that we may not find so obvious, and on which we might have to work seriously together. Three come to mind: one having to do with spirituality, one with celibacy, and one with participation in a movement as such.

First, then, an extremely important part of the women's movement now is a concern for spirituality, for "feminist" spirituality, if you will. This, in large part, was what Dr. Chung was about in her World Council of Churches address. Women generally, in every religious tradition and perhaps especially in Christianity are voicing their need, their hunger, for spiritual nourishment. There are many who anguish over not only their own needs for spiritual food, but the needs of their children. Who will provide access to the great springs of spiritual life in the church, who find ways to overcome the "iconographic impoverishment" which women (and some men) experience so sharply? Have we not a responsibility, steeped in traditions of spirit-life and yet working together to find new forms, new sources of spirit-power to sustain the fountain of life begun in our hearts by the grace and the promise of Jesus Christ? If we are to stand with women, to labor with women in their struggle for equality and full humanity, must we not be ready to share our thirst and our taste of the fountain of spirit-water, our hunger and our share in the bread of the spirit, our search and our findings — for the heart, the spirit, the mind, as well as the body?

Second, is it possible that by reason of our celibacy we have a particular contribution to make in solidarity with the women of the world? One of the gravest concerns of women worldwide, especially in the countries of east and southeast Asia, is with the centuries old yet still growing tendency to view women as available for market exchange. Not only in prostitution and pornography, not only as providers of heirs, not only as pawns in the economic arrangements of families, but even in the ordinary economic structures of marriage, the worth of women is a market exchange kind of worth. Lesbian women have countered this with the political cry, "We are not available," a cry that in some sense serves the cause of all women. But celibate women, too, can join that cry — not as a denunciation of sexuality or of relationships with men, not as a judgment on other authentic styles of life and ways of intimacy, but nonetheless as a sign that the worth of women is not dependent on their availability to or their dependence upon men; that women are not for sale. Even to suggest this as a contribution to the women's movement may challenge our commitment to solidarity with women, or challenge our understandings of the needs of women whose lives we profess to share.

. . . any movement depends not only on its nucleus, its core group of committed participants, but also on those at its periphery.

Third, I have wondered what difference it would make to our self-understanding as a religious community were we to think of religious life as not only a "way" of life but as itself a "movement." There is much in our history and in the history of religious orders generally to suggest such an interpretation of what we are about. I first had this thought when about five years ago I asked a student of mine about the status of the movement at Yale against apartheid in South Africa. Her response was that any movement depends not only on its nucleus, its core group of committed participants, but also on those at its periphery.[7] Today our core is not so large as it once was, but the periphery is growing. If we are in any sense a religious movement (even analogously), then we may not only interpret our own situation differently than we do; we may have much to offer in both wisdom and sustenance to other movements, and particularly to the contemporary women's movement.

However strange these considerations may seem to you, my point is to suggest that a commitment to stand in solidarity with women in their struggle for life and equality, in the church and society, may ask of us new and different things than we have heretofore imagined. But we shall perhaps only know this as we continue to walk with women of all classes and races, all national backgrounds and faiths, all ages and experiences; and as we share their tears and weep our own, not in final desolation but in the river of action.

C. To One Another

This leads me easily to the third commitment in our Direction Statement, our commitment *to one another as we embrace our multi-cultural and international reality.* This, as I understood it, was a commitment to sustain and to nurture the reality of the Institute as a new community (of previously separate congregations) *and* to learn the ways of faithfulness as an international and multi-cultural community. The former rose out of both the joys and the strains of a first attempt to be one community forged out of many. The latter rose out of the experienced presence of sisters from many countries and the struggle along with them to recognize both diversity and communality. These are, I think, two related but quite distinct commitments.

. . . community has always existed on at least three levels: local community, friendship . . . within community, and the wider province and national community.

On the one hand, a commitment to *grow into community,* to forge bonds with individuals and groups newly met, is necessary if the Institute is to live a full life and serve a common mission. Moreover, everyone *desires* community in liberating forms and nourishing frameworks. This commitment, then, makes it possible to call to one another for sisterhood and for friendship, for collaboration and support. It also makes possible an expansion of our understanding of what "community" can mean for us. For example, community has always existed on at least three levels: local community, friendship with individuals within community, and the wider province and national community. This remains true, with more numerous possibilities for friendships and for local community. But it also makes real the possibility of community in an even larger sphere, giving us concrete hope for the development of church community at that level, and the development even of human community.

This in turn, then, connects with the *international and multi-cultural* aspects and levels of our commitment to community. Our needs and obligations in this regard were first expressed in the Chapter proposal for additional delegates from non-U.S. countries — an affirmative action proposal aimed at fairness of representation and the fostering of the common good. One of the graced moments of the Chapter was the final passage of this proposal in its strongest form. But more than this, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the experience at the Chapter of the international reality of the Institute. Would that this could be replicated in every regional community.[8] It holds the grace of our learning the meaning of "world church," of our joining with other women in refusing a false universalization of one group's experience, of our understanding Christianity as a minority religious tradition in the world of today. To be faithful to this commitment is to be faithful to our call as Christians, as human beings, as women, and as Sisters of Mercy.

I began these considerations of the threefold commitment within the Direction Statement of the Institute as a way of reflecting with you on the nature of our life together and our shared mission, on our place in the church and in the world, and our situation before God. I want to move into a somewhat different mode of analysis now by offering a perspective on what may be the heart of our call and our covenanted life together. It is suggested to me by an image that Christianity has offered for understanding a call to share in human suffering.

II. "Can you drink the cup?"

The image I have in mind is one that Jesus used in the accounts we have of his response to the question of James and John (and their mother) about a possible place for them in the rule of God to come. He said to them, "Can you drink the cup that I will drink?" They answered, "We can." (Matthew 20:22)[9] Of course, as in so many of the gospels' scenes, we know the irony of their response, for they had still not quite "gotten the point" of Jesus's question — a point they failed to understand until the last days of Jesus's life began to unfold in all their horror, and a point they may not have finally understood until they saw and could touch the wounds of the risen Christ. We know the irony of their response, but we may have difficulties of our own in understanding the full meaning of drinking the cup that Jesus drinks. Indeed, what can it mean for us to drink this cup?

Clearly the image says something about a call to suffering and to the cross. But insofar as this is so, we have good reasons in our skeptical age — especially as women — to resist the question, or at least to resist placing it at the center of our self-understanding. For at least two problems confront us immediately. First, serious critics of Christianity have charged that it is precisely preoccupation with suffering that has prevented Christians from working for justice. From Friedrich Nietzsche to Mary Daly[10] the argument has come that Christianity is a religion for victims, that it can provide a spirituality only for weaklings, that its response to human injustice is to make a virtue of being oppressed. Christianity in this view seduces its adherents and makes them passive, docile, resigned to oppression even unto death.

A second challenge to any focus on suffering

emerges from the commitment we have made to a preferential option for the poor. One of the struggles we have had with this commitment is that it creates a kind of competition among sufferings. We struggle to understand that bodily miseries demand our primary attention and resources: The poor to be given preference are the materially poor. On the other hand we hear the cries of the human spirit, the needs of all persons for more than one kind of nourishment and for more than upward economic mobility. Limited in our capabilities, we are torn, for example, by calls to shelter the homeless on the one hand and to counsel the doubtful on the other.

Chastened and sobered by such problems and criticisms, the question nonetheless remains: What does it mean for us to "drink the cup?" To answer this question we still need to understand human suffering — not so that our hearts melt in compassionate feeling without a sense of justice and injustice; not so that all we see is suffering and oppression and not the persons and possibilities around us; but so that our sense of justice may be awakened and sustained by the recognition that those who suffer injustice "feel their lives" and do so in a way that we cannot ignore.

Sometimes it is helpful to look at a kind of paradigm of human suffering — what some have called human "tales of terror" and "whirlpools of torment,"[11] where bodies are destroyed, minds ravaged, and spirits broken. These are the sufferings that go on in human history generation after generation — a "voice heard in Ramah weeping" (Jeremiah 31:15), peoples subjugated by peoples, families rent asunder, stories of rape and starvation, abandonment, confusion, violence and relentless dying. This is the wort of human pain that Simone Weil named "affliction," differentiating it from "suffering" in the ordinary sense.[12] It is, she aid, always both physical and spiritual; it is never only physical (like a toothache that is soon over and gone), but it is also never only spiritual. With this kind of suffering, there is no competition between miseries of the body and miseries of the soul. For affliction when it is spiritual always also afflicts, leaves wounds in, the body; and when it is bodily, if it goes on long enough, it always also effects the spirit.

This is the kind of suffering that has the power to uproot life; that can be in itself the equivalent of death; that almost always includes some form of humiliation, some social degradation; that has the potential to attack the self-chaining down thoughts to become a "state of mind" that persons can live in sometimes twenty, thirty, fifty years, a lifetime; and in which one's very soul threatens to become its accomplice, pulling to inertia and despair.[13] In its ultimate forms this kind of suffering perhaps always finally includes and element of the experience of the absence of God — of the God-forsakenness that overwhelmed Job or that made Jesus Christ cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."

What does "Can you drink the cup?" mean? Perhaps ultimately: "Can you enter into life even unto affliction, even to the point of death?" But more must be said about it than this. For what Jesus tried to reveal to his first disciples and through them to us was not only that they must be willing to suffer, to endure a suffering that might be like his own; but rather: "Can you drink the cup *that I will drink?"* The cup to be shared was and is the cup of Jesus Christ, *which is the cup of the suffering of all* persons. If we are to drink this cup, we are to partake of the sufferings of everyone else. But if we are to do this, if we are to do more than look upon others with pity, we must paradoxically know something of affliction in ourselves. We must have at least inklings of the possibility of sufferings that reach all the way to humiliation and degradation, where the lines between body and spirit are no longer sharp and where competition among miseries may be silenced.

There *is* a love that is stronger than death . . . that can hold every suffering until it is transformed into a fountain of life.

The image of the cup opens to yet more, however. In part we are helped to see this by the critics (whom I have already noted) who find in Christianity a religion of weakness and death. For they press us to probe further the nature of the reality that the image signifies. There are at least two more important characteristics of the suffering which is at the heart of the image. First, it surely must be said that the cup signifies all kinds of human suffering — suffering in the forms of sickness and tragic accident, aging and diminishment, human miscommunication and disparities in love, catastrophes great and small. Yet something in particular characterizes those sufferings that are central to the image. Given the context and the nature of the final sufferings of Jesus, there can be little doubt that the centrally imaged form of suffering is, specifically, suffering that is the *consequence of injustice.* Here is the suffering that *does not have to be,* the suffering that results from exploitation and oppression, violence and abuse, human indifference and abandonment. Here is the suffering that cries out for an end not in death but in change!

Secondly, those who call Christianity a religion obsessed with necromancy and pain are wrong to think that the point of the cup or the cross is suffering and death. The point is, rather, that a *relationship holds.* There *is* a love that is stronger than death, that can

withstand whatever the forces of evil may do against it, and that can hold every suffering until it is transformed into a fountain of life. Here is a cup of covenant that signifies the promise of a God who drinks, too, of human suffering; a cup that signifies the solidarity of agony and life with all persons and the possibility of each one's covenanting with the other in the strength of that life.

The image, then, comes full circle. The cup is not only a cup of suffering but a cup of love and a cup of life. Indeed, we come to it not drawn by a delight in suffering but by the love of God for us revealed in the suffering of Jesus Christ, and by the oneness of all persons now forever held in the purposes of this cup. Moved by love to alleviate pain, we can come to yearn for justice; and insofar as it is possible to us, we are moved to do the deeds of justice which are for us the deeds of mercy and of love. *This* is at the heart of our lives together and of all of our commitments. This is essential to the way of Christian mercy for which we hold special responsibility.

I think myself, in other words, that the reality imaged by the cup is at least very close to the central reality of our call. I will add only one short consideration beyond this. It is necessary because another question presses itself on us. Insofar as we are moved to action against unnecessary and unjust suffering, what can we do? If we share a common mission, is there also a common strategy? Of course, if we ourselves are the cause of anyone's unjust suffering, obviously we can and must stop causing it. But if others are the cause (of suffering that does not have to be), and we must try to stop them, what can we do? Or if the cause is larger than we are, even though we may be complicit in it, what can we do?

III. "Touch my hands . . . my side. Do not doubt, but believe."

The problem with activating those who have power to help in the alleviation of suffering is that they often do not believe us when we (and others) protest their own injustice or their failure to stand with us against injustice. No doubt we experience this most painfully when we encounter it in those who hold institutional power in the church. We can find ourselves disbelieved when we insist that it is unjust to refuse power to the poor as laypersons (in ordinary parishes as well as base communities); when we argue that it is unjust to judge parents for their use of effective contraceptives; when we plead that it is unjust to deny ordained ministry to women or to married persons; when we protest that it is unjust to exclude gay men and lesbians from full participation in the life of the church; when we insist that it is unjust to remain silent before the exploitation of workers, unjust to support racist and sexist practices, etc. This is sometimes our experience in relation to the church, but it is also, of course, often our experience in relation to other institutions and to society as a whole.

In the story of Jesus's encounter with Thomas after the resurrection, there is a clue as to how the Spirit of God makes belief possible. As he had done with the other disciples, Jesus now shows Thomas the nail-prints in his hands, the wound in his side. "Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand in my side. Do not doubt, but believe." The disciples, and Thomas among them, are to recognize Jesus by his wounds.

. . . Jesus can be recognized, his presence can be believed, in the wounds of every person.

It may then be that Jesus can be recognized, his presence can be believed, in the wounds of every person. For we believe that the risen Jesus is somehow united with the whole of humanity; that the body of Christ is now not separable from the body of the whole Christ. What a clue we may have for opening the eyes of faith, for awakening belief in the truthful worth and painful needs of those who suffer from injustice, whose misery calls out to its "last resort"! If the connections are there, if recognition can thus be rendered possible, if what was thought "nonsense" can in this way make sense, then we must present to those in power not merely our arguments or even our testimony; we must present to them the wounds, the sufferings, of those with whom we have committed ourselves to stand in solidarity. There is hope that when others touch these wounds, when they behold them and reach into them, they will recognize Jesus Christ. They will cease to doubt, and believe. They, too, will hear the voice of the poor, attend to the stories of women, let Christianity bring its good news without doing violence to the peoples around the world.

To suggest such a "strategy" is not to subject those who suffer to a new form of voyeurism, not to sentimentalize the possibilities of human response. It is only to recognize that some private pain must become public responsibility, that the personal wounds of many may be the political problems of all. Whoever can "touch" may also believe, for there is grace and power in the wounds of the body of a risen, though still stricken, Lord.

Conclusion: The One Thing Necessary

I began my considerations by saying that I had entitled them, "One Thing Only is Necessary." This is indeed my conclusion from the many things I have been trying to understand. We have committed ourselves to many things: to stand with the economically poor, to embrace the causes of women, to take one

another into our hearts — across, but not without attention to, the boundaries of historical communities, cultures, and nations. We have placed ourselves in a position where we must offer of our substance, not only of our "superfluities," and give of our spirits as well as our bodies.

We still have all the questions that we had when we began the new Institute: What shall we do? How are we to labor? How shall we survive? We move forward by making decisions and by trying to be faithful to the decisions, the commitments, we have made. Why will you elect leadership with special responsibility to hold the center together for all of us?

One thing only is necessary: that the mercy of God be freed in our world, that it be made present again and again — even to us, in us, from us. Survival is an important goal if we have an important mission. Particular directions are significant if they are asked of us because of who we are and what we recognize we must do.

In the end, we shall be asked only one thing: "Were you merciful?" If we are asked, "Were you poor, were you celibate, were you obedient?" it will be only insofar as these were relevant to: "Were you merciful?" I do not mean that these (poverty, chastity, obedience) will have been unimportant, or that our "lifestyle" will not have been tested. But mercy is not for the sake of a lifestyle; a lifestyle is for the sake of being merciful. Mercy, moreover, is not reducible to any of its works, for "Were you merciful?" will be a question of the heart.

I have not spoken today of what mercy means, and yet I may have spoken of nothing else. Perhaps, in the end, I have meant to say that mercy means blending our lives by our tears of sorrow and of joy, and living our tears in our action. It requires drinking a cup of intimate and global pain, but also of communion, of love, and of hope. It means recognizing in the wounds of persons a new possibility for healing, finding by a new faith a new future, believing in a transformation long promised and a glory already begun.

To the skeptical or frightened voices who say to us that the human heart and the human world cannot be healed enough for justice and mercy to reign, those who drink the cup must say, "The command and promise of God is 'Thou shalt, thou canst, love God with all thing heart . . . unto the squeezing out of the soul'"[14] insofar as we are able. To those opposing voices who would say, "You most foolish of all persons,' those who share their tears and drink the cup and do not turn away from woundedness must say with Job, "Our redeemer lives, and we have known glory in weakness yet a freedom that is full of power." To those who say to us, "God's ways are not your ways,' we must respond that this is true, but it is true only because God is *more* just than we are, not less; and God is *more* merciful than we are, not less. And such a God we will follow.

Footnotes

1. See Gregory Baum, "Good-bye to the Ecumenist," *The Ecumenist* 29 (Spring, 1991), 1-3.

2. Baum, p. 2.

3. Baum, p. 3.

4. It is worth pondering here Baum's conclusion: "Christians for whom faith and justice have become intertwined will want to keep their networks, centers, and institutions alive. They will continue to search for opportunities to involve themselves in action." p. 3. What this should mean for us in the concrete remains to be discerned.

5. Francine Cardman, "Liberating Compassion: Spirituality for a New Millennium," *The Way*, forthcoming.

6. See Margaret A. Farley, "Weep for Yourselves and for Your Children," *Criterion* 21 (Winter, 1982), 19-21.

7. Her point was that there must be a strong periphery if the movement is to make a difference. When the periphery diminishes, the movement can remain, but it will be largely latent in its power to fulfill its aims as a movement. By *our* periphery I mean particularly the new forms of membership being developed by the Sisters of Mercy. But the notion can also extend to the variety of ways in which we collaborate with non-members. "Periphery" here is precisely *not* a derogatory term, and at any given point in time it represents a dynamic relationship that may or may not have anything to do with "hierarchy."

8. One regional community, Detroit, recognized the importance of trying to do this. At an all-community meeting it tried to concretize the presence of its Argentine members by incorporating their tape-recorded contributions. This points to the need for further imaginative measures to bring together Sisters of Mercy from many cultures and nations (and to do this in ways that do not use those from other cultures and nations to serve once again the agendas set primarily by those in the dominant culture and nation).

9. These reflections will appear in significantly expanded form in a forthcoming publication of the Rauschenbush Lectures delivered at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in March, 1991.

10. I refer here to the feminist theologian, Mary Daly, who is the author of such influential works as *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

11. The phrases belong to Phyllis Trible and James Crenshaw. See Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

12. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Crauford (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 117-25. I do not want to subscribe to the whole of Weil's views on suffering, but her analysis of "affliction" seems to be a powerful rendition of deep aspects of the experience of human pain.

13. Weil, pp. 118-19.

14. Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpretation of Judaism and Christianity*, trans. N.P. Goldhawk (N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 136.

Contributors

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Questions for Study/Reflection

1. Women's reflections don't figure significantly in centenary-related literature about Columbus. What "dangerous memories" or aspects of women's experience would you imaginatively "supply" to discussions of Columbus' culture and times, land and people of the Americas, and the impact of his journey and subsequent conquest?

2. What "namings" of the 500th centenary of Columbus' voyage describe the benefits and limitations of the work on behalf of Mercy that you are presently doing — e.g. discovery, encounter conquest, evangelization, colonization . . . ? What word suggests a metaphor for your current form of spiritual energy?

3. How does the liberating message of the Institute's directional statement get communicated where you work? Do the people you serve express in any way their consciousness that this process of liberation is going on? What personal vision of Guadalupe animates you: new light on the feminine, on the politically oppressed, on the economically poor, on the church itself?

4. As the number of priests declines, parish life in the Catholic church is involving the contributions of more and more laity. What are your own feelings about this shift from a priest-based, sacramental church to one high-lighting laity-led ministries? What anxieties? What hopes do you have?

5. Fundamentalism in any religious tradition stresses conformity to a code of belief and obedience to authority. "Critical thinking" represents a departure from allegiance to "true faith." Do the policies of the institution where I live or work lay stress on conformity or invite participative and critical reflection? In what values about conformity/critical reflection am I like my family or different from them?

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