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Catherine McAuley

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Fall, 1992

Dear Sisters and Friends,

As THE MAST JOURNAL enters into its third year of publication we again bring you an issue devoted to the searching among us to understand ourselves through the prism of Catherine McAuley's life. As we all know, religious life continues to unfold. Since the Second Vatican Council we have been self-conscious about both our ignorance regarding how to proceed and our sometimes wavering faith in the God who has called us to proceed. We have trusted in those who have gone before us and in faith understood that we, whether associate or vowed, are called to understand our life as Catherine understood hers. As I read these articles, one question continues to challenge, "what is our role in revealing the boundless founding grace of Catherine McAuley's life?" Clearly, we are her legacy but our call is not to do exactly as she did. Rather, we are, like her "foreign powers," the early superiors, to "go and do likewise" in our own time and space. What does "likewise" look like and what should it not look like?

Don't miss the book reviews toward the end of the issue or the questions asking us to probe our experience on page 20. THE MAST JOURNAL would welcome your musings, your responses to the articles, whether they arise spontaneously or from your focus on the reflection questions. Please send them to me at the address below.

In Christ and Catherine,

Maryanne Stevens, RSM

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The Legacy of Catherine McAuley and the Transformative Elements for Religious Life in the Future

Sheila Carney, RSM

In August of 1989 the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men met in joint assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. The purpose of this gathering was to articulate a vision for religious life in the year 2010 — what was then 20 years hence. This was no easy task in a group of 900 individuals coming from all over the country, from all sizes and sorts of communities and traditions and life styles. But we did it. We emerged from that assembly, having articulated what we called ten transformative elements — ten characteristics of religious life we expected we would be living in the year 2010.

Having returned home from the meeting and having reported to my community what we did there, I tucked the transformative elements away. We were working hard on birthing an Institute and that transformation was the more important focus.

Recently, however, this work has re-surfaced and, with it, the realization of its particular applicability to Sisters of Mercy; its particular resonance with our tradition. Reflection on these transformative elements simultaneously draws us forward and calls us back in time. While we may see in them a vision for the future of religious life, we also recognize elements of the spirit of Catherine McAuley which have been integral to our heritage. What LCWR/CMSM members saw in the future are, in most instances, the building blocks upon which Catherine structured the early community. While the resonance with some of the transformative elements sounds more strongly than with others, each offers the opportunity for an initial reflection and an invitation to further search and dialogue.

Prophetic Witness:

Being converted by the example of Jesus and the values of the gospel, religious in the year 2010 will serve a prophetic role in church and society. Living this prophetic witness will include societal and ecclesial values and structures, calling for systemic change and being converted by the marginalized with whom we serve.

The centrality of Gospel values and the necessity of conforming oneself to the example of Jesus are integral to the spirit of Catherine. We read in *Tender Courage*: "Long hours of attendance in Mrs. Callaghan's sick room afforded Catherine opportunity for ever-deepening reflection on the Gospel, enabling her to find it a blueprint for action."¹ She describes this reflection — action dynamic in asserting:

"Our Divine Model, Jesus Christ, should be in

regard of a Religious like a book continually open before her, from which she must learn what she is to think, say and do."²

Most significant in this quotation is its ending, emphasizing a conformity not only in mind and in heart, but also in action — emphasizing the integration of mind, and heart and action. This becomes an oft articulated theme.

"The proof of love is deed."³

"Love of God...love of neighbor are cause and effect."⁴

"If the love of God really reigns in our hearts, it will quickly show itself in the exterior."⁵

Particularly pointed is the maxim which warns: "If we do not form our minds on the values of Jesus Christ, we will never acquire his evangelical spirit."⁶

It is this evangelical spirit, this gospel perspective which impels us to critique social and ecclesial structures and to insist on the systemic change called for by this transformative element. The fact that Catherine did not overtly engage in this kind of activity can be attributed to the times in which she lived. The fact that she would do so today or would applaud our doing so is incontrovertible.

Contemplative Attitude Toward Life:

Religious in 2010 will have a contemplative attitude toward all creation. They will be attentive to and motivated by the presence of the sacred in their own inner journeys, in the lives of others, and throughout creation. Recognizing contemplation as a way of life for the whole church, they will see themselves and their communities as centers of spirituality and the experience of God.

The "issue" of contemplation versus action or contemplative versus active spirituality has been part of our congregational conversation from our earliest days. This is indeed fortunate, since it means that we have Catherine's clear perspective on this seeming dichotomy — not one or the other she asserts, but a graceful and necessary blending of the two.

We can be grateful for this clarity to Clare Agnew and to Mary Ann Doyle — both of whom were drawn to a more "cloistered" form of religious life than Catherine envisioned for her community. In response to Clare, Catherine penned a little jewel of a document which we know familiarly as the Bermondsey Manuscript or the "Spirit of the Institute."⁷ In its first paragraph she describes interdependence of prayer and ministry for the Sisters of Mercy.

To devote our lives to the accomplishment of our own salvation and to promote the salvation of oth-

ers is the end and object of our Order of Mercy. These two works are so linked together by our rule and observances that they reciprocally help each other. We should often reflect that our progress in spiritual life consists in the faithful discharge of the duties belonging to our state, as regards both ourselves and our neighbor; and we must consider the time and exertion which we employ for the relief and instruction of the poor and ignorant as most conducive to our own advancement in perfection, and the time given to prayer and all other pious exercises, we must consider as employed to obtain the grace, strength and animation which alone could enable us to persevere in the meritorious obligations of our state; and if we were to neglect these means of obtaining Divine Support we would deserve that God should stop the course of His graces to make us sensible that all our efforts would be fruitless except we were continually renewed and replenished with His Divine Spirit.⁸

This strong statement is drawn out in the remainder of the document and finds expression elsewhere in her writings as well. "The spirit of the Institute is Mercy toward those who are afflicted with ignorance, suffering and like miseries. This requires such a combination of the spirit of Mary and Martha that one does not hinder but helps the other."⁹ This is a wonderful image — evoking as it does the picture of very different and personal ways of being with and caring for the body of Christ as well as highlighting the encouragement and support that Jesus gives to each woman's choice.

Elsewhere, she draws on the circular, cyclical image of the compass to make this point. "We should be like the compass that goes round its cycle without stirring from the center...Our center is God, from whom all our actions spring as from their source and no exterior action should separate us from Him."¹⁰ The returning, reviving cycle of prayer and ministry — each calling forth the other — was clearly alive in her and is clearly alive in her legacy to us.

Poor and Marginalized Persons as the Focus for Ministry:

Religious in 2010 will be investing their resources in direct service with, and advocacy for structural change on behalf of the poor and marginalized. They will minister where others will not go. Their own listening to and learning from the poor and marginalized will shape all aspects of their lives.

Living with Less:

Religious in the year 2010 will be transformed by the poor, living a simpler life-style that includes reverence for the earth. They will develop a spirituality that will free them to be more authentic witnesses

by letting go of non-essentials, by being content with what is enough, and by sharing their resources with the poor.

An alternative motivation for the above might be economic circumstances beyond our control.

Where can we find a better example of investing resources in direct service than in the generosity of the heiress, Catherine McAuley? And where better example for choosing to live simply and to let go of nonessentials than in the woman who declared: "I would rather be cold and hungry than that the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford."¹¹ and "Let us never desire more than enough. God will give us that and a blessing."¹²

She was perfectly clear and undeluded about the consequences of such choices. "Do not be disheartened, if when advocating the claims of the poor whom you represent, you now and again receive the treatment of beggars — followers of Christ must share the fortunes of disciples."¹³ and "It is for God we serve the poor and not for thanks."¹⁴

Catherine was equally clear about the gentleness and respect which should characterize our interactions with those in need of our ministrations "Performing our duties for God we should act as for a person whom we tenderly love."¹⁵ and "There are three things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost the donor nothing. Among these are the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows."¹⁶ It is written of her that she learned that it is genuine solicitude, genuine being with another that moves hearts.¹⁷ This characterizes her manner of relating both to the sisters and to the poor.

Spirituality of Wholeness and Global Interconnectedness:

Animated by their deep conviction of the oneness of creation, religious in 2010 will live and work in a manner which fosters:

- a. participation and harmony among all people,*
- b. healthy personal and interpersonal relationships,*
- c. reverence for the earth,*
- d. integration of spirituality and technology on behalf of the gospel.*

Developing Interdependence Among People of Diverse Cultures:

Racial and demographic changes will by the year 2010 alter the face of our local church and our congregations. Our interactions with persons of various cultures and races will have uncovered our enduring racism, prejudices and intolerances and called us to deeper inculturation, interdependence and openness to being evangelized by others.

Catherine's vibrant sense of sisterhood with all per-

sons led her to exhort the sisters never to speak with contempt of any nation, class or profession. Joanna Regan and Isabelle Keiss suggest that this open and respectful attitude may derive, at least in part, from her long exposure to Quaker belief and practice in the Callaghan household. They wrote:

"Catherine [Callaghan],¹⁸ a gentle Quakeress, set the tone in which affirmation of the indwelling Spirit and redemptive love were spiritual realities. Love of God and love of neighbor found expression in social attitudes and concerns, in service, and in education. The Friends' belief that there is potential for good in each person and the consequent sensitivity to human degradation, ignorance, suffering and injustice touched a responsive chord in Catherine."¹⁹

Her promotion of healthy personal and interpersonal relationships can be glimpsed in the exhortation "Sisters of Mercy should be the kindest people in the world...Members of the same body, we should all partake of the grace and joys of one another. Exercises of charity performed abroad have no value before God if there be not established at home a solid foundation of that virtue...Well ordered charity begins at home."²⁰ Recognition that "too many women living together engender troublesome humors of mind and body"²¹ notwithstanding, she was able to boast that "no breach of charity ever occurred among us. The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger."²²

Catherine's insight that our ability to live within harmonious relationships flows from our life within Mercy is reflected in the Magnificat of Mercy composed in 1828:

*"Sweet Mercy! Soothing, patient, kind;
softens the high and rears the fallen mind;
knows with just rein and even hand to guide
between false fear and arbitrary pride.
Not easily provoked, she soon forgives:
feels love for all and by a look relieves.
Soft peace she brings wherever she arrives,
removes our anguish and transforms our lives;
lays the rough paths of peevish nature even—
and opens in each heart a little heaven."*²³

Still another dimension (one deserving further investigation) in which the Quaker influence on Catherine may be discerned is in what the transformative elements describe as change in the locus of power.

Change of the Locus of Power:

Religious in 2010 will have replaced models of domination and control with principles of mutuality drawn from feminist and ecological insights, so that collaborative modes of decision-making and power-sharing are normative. Priorities for service will be generated and shaped in the local arena: while impetus for such action will be influenced by global awareness.

Carmel Bourke describes Catherine's style of gov-

ernance as "life giving authority and...liberating leadership."²⁴ From the very beginnings of the ministry which would grow into the Congregation of Mercy, she involved her collaborators in decisions which could by rights have been reserved solely to herself. Among these were the date for the opening of Baggot Street and the choice of a rule on which to model their own. Such an inclusive style enfolded her conviction that "the work transcended individual ownership."²⁵

While creating bonds of the heart through visits and letters to the "Foreign Powers," Catherine established no governmental links between Baggot Street and the foundations. She interacted with local superiors as with her peers — supporting, encouraging and enabling their individual gifts, respecting their autonomy and intelligence. To Teresa White she wrote, "I leave you free to do what you think best. I am satisfied you will not act imprudently, and this conviction makes me happy."²⁶ And to Elizabeth Moore, "Never suppose you can make me feel displeasure by giving any opinion that occurs to you."²⁷

With great sensitivity to the individuality of each new setting, Catherine established the practice of placing local sisters at each foundation "so that people might not feel that all the nuns were strangers."²⁸ She reminded Frances Warde that "every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to when possible."²⁹

She disliked formality, and an over-emphasis on religiosity and regularity. Only at Archbishop Murray's insistence did she agree to the title "Mother." In her writings she sometimes refers to herself as animator — which more clearly describes the role she felt the leader should play.³⁰ Community business was discussed freely during evening recreation in an atmosphere which Clare Augustine Moore described as being less formal than that to which she was accustomed at home.

A great sense of personal security and a desire to establish new patterns of governance are evident in this leader who so readily and confidently shares her authority, in this founder who so willingly cedes to others the accomplishment of her vision.

Broad-Based, Inclusive Communities:

In 2010, religious communities will be characterized by inclusivity and intentionality. These communities may include persons of different ages, genders, cultures, races, and sexual orientation. They may include persons who are lay or cleric, married or single, as well as vowed and/or unwowed members. They will have a core group and persons with temporary and permanent commitments.

These communities will be ecumenical, possibly interfaith; faith-sharing will be constitutive of the quality of life in this context of expanded membership. Such inclusivity will necessitate a new understanding of membership and a language to accom-

pany it.

Religious life will still include religious congregations of permanently vowed members.

The structure of Catherine's community reflected the constraints on religious congregations in those times. So, the early Mercy congregation was not "broad based and inclusive" in the manner described in this transformative element.

What is clear, however, is the spirit of inclusivity which sought to remove impediments to membership (such as insufficient dowry), and which welcomed anyone whose heart was drawn to the mission. Mary Celeste Rouleau's reflection, "A New Paradigm for Mercy," reminds us that "everywhere Catherine and her sisters went, they drew around them a circle of women and some men who participated enthusiastically in the mission."³¹ This welcoming of lay collaborators extended the boundaries, not only of the mission but also of the typical experience of religious life at that time.

The Mercy congregation of 1992 is, as our Institute direction statement emphasizes, a multicultural, international reality. From this perspective it is interesting, even charming, to note that one manifestation of inclusivity in the early community was the admission of women who weren't Irish!

Catherine describes the entrance of Eliza Munro in a letter to Frances Warde: "I am quite renovated by a delightful addition to the flock. On Wednesday last, the first Scotch Sister that has joined an Irish community... The variety of accent is now quite amusing at recreation."³² The entrance in London of two postulants "one from Liverpool, 2nd the daughter of a rich Portugal merchant,"³³ is noted in a letter to Cecilia Marmion.

Even more important, however, than these beginnings of cultural diversity was the climate of inclusivity and mutuality which marked the early community and overflowed in what Catherine named as the blessing of unity. "The blessing of unity still dwells among us, and oh, what a blessing! It should make all things else pass into nothing. All laugh and play together: not one cold stiff soul appears. From the day they enter, all reserve of any ungracious kind leaves them. This is the true spirit of our Order; indeed the true spirit of Mercy flowing on us."³⁴

Understanding Ourselves as Church

An essential element of religious life in 2010 will be our ability to accept the concept that "we are church." As people of God, we assume our priestly role of shared leadership in the life and worship of the local church. We support all members of the church as equals in diverse ministries.

Catherine, when giving retreats or conferences for the sisters, sometimes jokingly referred to herself as Father McAuley,³⁵ but we know that the notion of assuming a priestly role, as we understand it, would

have been foreign to her. It is in viewing all as equals in a diversity of ministries that we see her understanding of all as Church.

The women who joined Catherine were not formed to mirror some ideal image of a religious. Rather, the life experience, gifts and concerns of each were cherished and supported and this spirit shaped the young community. Each was encouraged to enfold the charism in distinct and personal ways and the result was a congregation whose works are as broad and manifold as human need.

As part of a commentary on the chapter on Union and Charity in the Presentation rule, we read in *Tender Courage*:

"Interpreted by Catherine, this chapter gave focus to their spirituality, demanding that each respect and reverence another's gifts, talents and dispositions, as well as accept each individual's physical, emotional, psychic and spiritual limitations. It created unity within variety by permitting members to retain their own personalities while becoming bonded as Sisters of Mercy."³⁶

That she prized the individuality of each sister and encouraged the expression of that individuality in ministry, is one of Catherine's early and formative gifts to her community.

Charism and Mission as Sources of Identity:

By the year 2010, religious groups will have re-examined, reclaimed and set free the charisms of their foundresses/founders. Corporate ownership of a focused vision gives meaning and expression to mission and ministry. Some groups who share similar visions/charisms have already joined together.

There is no doubt that mission was the source of identity for Catherine and the early community. She paid a price for this identity as the founder of the walking nuns — a group initially distrusted and derided for their departure from the familiar customs of religious in those days. For her, mission was at the center — before there was a community there was a ministry and it was to protect that ministry that she risked the founding of a religious congregation.

This last of the transformative elements is really for us, as members of the newly born Institute. The Institute Chapter has given us a clearly articulated and focused direction statement. In the months since July, 1991, all over the country and in every regional community, groups of sisters have been meeting and reflecting on this statement. We are all asking: What difference will it make to us to have written and affirmed these words? What difference to me? To my regional community? To our Institute? Can we? Will we allow ourselves to be transformed by the vision we have espoused? Having committed "our lives and resources" will we also commit to reflection on the meaning of these gifts freely given? What is this life

lived in Mercy to which each of us has committed and which we now offer corporately to the concerns articulated in the direction statement? Our contemporary understanding of ourselves as Sisters of Mercy flows from grappling with identity questions such as these.

* * * * *

What does all of this mean? What is the significance of the LCWR/CMSM process that resulted in naming the transformative elements? It means, for one thing that religious life in the country is becoming more focused. That 900 leaders from diverse communities, traditions, geographical areas, ministries, life styles can agree on ten characteristics of future religious communities is something of a miracle.

But it suggests something deeper for the Sisters of Mercy, I think, who can look at the transformative elements, representing, as they do, a national consciousness, and find the original vision of Catherine McAuley mirrored in them. In practical terms, this coherence between the LCWR/CMSM national agenda and our own will enable us to focus energy and effort.

At a deeper level, we may see that our past has reached out and joined hands with our future and that we are caught in that embrace of heritage and vision and challenge. It means that we are doubly blessed and doubly dared. But we have birthed an Institute and charted a direction in which the blessing and the dare are joined and that union provides the energy for the further unfolding of Catherine's legacy.

Footnotes

1. M. Joanna Regan, RSM and Isabelle Keiss, RSM, *Tender Courage — A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine McAuley, First Sister of Mercy*. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), p. 17.
2. Catherine McAuley, *Thoughts From the Spiritual Conferences of Mother M. Catherine McAuley*. (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son Ltd., 1946), p. 11.
3. M. Angela Bolster, RSM, *Catherine McAuley, Venerable for Mercy*. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990), p. 75.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
7. We are indebted to Mary Sullivan, RSM for her illuminating work on the relationship between "The Spirit of the Institute" and the writings of Alonso Rodriguez and of the importance of Catherine's careful nuancing of the Rodriguez text.
8. Catherine McAuley, "The Spirit of the Institute".
9. Catherine McAuley.
10. Mary Teresa Purcell, *Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1952), p. 154.
11. M. Angela Bolster, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1827-1841*. (Stokes on Trent: Webberly, Ltd., 1989), p. 71.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
13. Catherine McAuley.
16. Bolster, *Venerable for Mercy*, p. 44.
17. Regan and Keiss, p. 17.
18. There is some question about Mrs. Callaghan's first name. Sister M. Bertrand Degnan also refers to her as Catherine. (*Mercy Unto Thousands*. Westminster: Newman Press, 1957, p. 19) However, Sister M. Nathy cites the existence of a 1776 marriage license in the names of William Callaghan and Anna Ryan who may or may not be the Callaghans who befriended Catherine. ("Catherine McAuley, Mercy Foundress, Veritas Publications, 1979)
19. Regan and Keiss, p. 15.
20. Bolster, *Venerable for Mercy*, p. 54.
21. Neumann, p. 293.
22. Neumann, p. 155.
23. Bolster, *Venerable for Mercy*, p. 13.
24. Carmel Bourke, RSM, *A Woman Sings of Mercy — Reflections on the Life and Spirit of Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy*. Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1987, p. 64.
25. Regan and Keiss, p. 25.
26. Neumann, p. 137.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
28. Bourke, p. 67.
29. Neumann, p. 147.
30. Regan and Keiss, p. 69.
31. Mary Celeste Rouleau, RSM, "A New Paradigm for Mercy," *The MAST Journal* 1 (Fall, 1990), p.7.
32. Neumann, p. 348.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 330-31.
35. Bolster, *Venerable for Mercy*, p. 104.
36. Regan and Keiss, p. 98.

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Comforting and Animating: The Generative Work of Catherine McAuley

Mary C. Sullivan, RSM

In this essay I wish to explore Catherine McAuley's concepts of comforting and animating, by which I believe she defined both her own unique contribution to the founding of the Sisters of Mercy, and two essential works of those who would personally quicken the re-founding of the mission of the Sisters of Mercy in this and the next century. To "comfort" and to "animate" are among the most frequently used words in Catherine's personal vocabulary. They are outgoing, life-giving and life-sustaining verbs which represent for her both the merciful action of God in our regard and two aspects of the merciful response which God asks of us in Christ Jesus.

Catherine's characteristic attraction to these verbs (and their noun and adjectival forms) is an important linguistic clue to her operative definition of mercifulness, and to the simplicity of her self-understanding as a "founder."¹ These words, which she so often uses, not only give insight into her implicit Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology; they also define central endeavors in what she would regard as the fundamental Gospel project of members and associates of the Sisters of Mercy.

Comforting the Afflicted:

In her letter of August 28, 1844, Clare Moore, one of Catherine's earliest associates, tells the moving story about Catherine and Mary Ann Redmond:

In July [1830] before Revd. Mother went to George's Hill, she was sent by Dr. [Michael] Blake to attend a young lady with white swelling in her knee. Her father and mother were dead, and she had no one with her, but a young inexperienced cousin and an old country nurse. Her name was Mary Ann Redmond, she was from Waterford or Cork. The first physicians were attending her and they judged it necessary to amputate the limb. Dr. Blake requested Revd. Mother to allow her to be in Baggot St. for the operation, as she was so friendless, and alone, in lodgings. Revd. Mother's charity readily consented, she was accommodated with the large room which is now divided into Noviceship and Infirmary. Mother Mary Ann [Doyle] and Sr. Mary Angela [Dunne] were present at the operation; her screams were frightful, we attended her night and day, for more than a month, at the end of which time she was removed a little way into the country.

Of this event the Bermondsey Annals says: "Miss McAuley offered her a home in Baggot Street that she might be able to assist and comfort her under this terrible operation, which was performed there, tho' with-

out any beneficial result. During the month that the young person was in the convent, she watched over her night and day with the solicitude of a parent..."²

This brief narrative of Catherine McAuley's comforting Mary Ann Redmond, watching over her night and day with the solicitude of a parent, is a revealing token of Catherine's character: a luminous story through which one can enter other stories of the larger narrative of her life and begin to plumb the precise quality of her mercifulness. For Catherine's life was, in large measure, what she understood every Christian life-narrative should be: a re-enactment, in a new time and place, of the continuing story of God's comforting self-bestowal in human history—in, with, and for the poor and suffering.

**"Truly, I say to you, as you did
it to one of the least of these
my brothers and sisters,
you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40)**

If one studies Catherine's life and reflects carefully on her written words and on the memoirs of her earliest associates, it is not hard to find the archetypal story of God's mercifulness in the light of which Catherine read and shaped her own life. That story is the example of Jesus of Nazareth, and the invitation to follow him which he makes explicit in his self-identification with the poor: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). In the most serious and deliberate words Catherine ever wrote—the sections of the Rule of the Sisters of Mercy which she herself composed—she repeatedly expressed this fundamental conviction of her life:

In undertaking the arduous, but very meritorious duty of instructing the Poor, the Sisters whom God has graciously pleased to call to this state...shall animate their zeal and fervor by the example of ...Jesus Christ, who testified on all occasions a tender love for the poor and declared that he would consider as done to Himself whatever should be done unto them. (1.2)³

She urged her sisters to remember that:

Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the

sick and dying Poor—as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master who has said: “Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me.” (3.1)

This was Catherine McAuley’s understanding of the essence of Christian mercifulness: deep interior and exterior resemblance to Jesus Christ and merciful solidarity with him in the person of the poor and needy, in their habitations and in her own. The rooms of her house, her tables and chairs, her beds and food, her body and spirit, her arms and legs, her health and sickness were for “the care of His most dear poor” (388).⁴ And it was this kind of ardent self-bestowal that she looked for in the first Sisters of Mercy.

Catherine seems to have put herself in the position of those who suffer and to have felt their suffering as her own.

The Derry Large Manuscript, in its present form, begins with the claim that even before the death of William Callaghan, Catherine took:

great delight in projecting means of affording shelter to unprotected young women. She had then no expectation of the large fortune that afterwards was hers, but her benefactor had once spoken of leaving her a thousand pounds, and she thought, if she had that, or even a few hundred, she would hire a couple of rooms and work for and with her protégées. The idea haunted her very dreams. Night after night she would see herself in some very large place where a number of young women were employed as laundresses or at plainwork, while she herself would be surrounded by a crowd of ragged children which she was washing and dressing very busily. The premises [on Baggot Street] therefore were planned to contain dormitories for young women who for want of proper protection might be exposed to danger, a female poor school, — and apartments for ladies who might choose, for any definite or indefinite time, to devote themselves to the service of the poor.

The House on Baggot Street became, in a variety of practical, merciful ways, a place of refuge, protection, training, and comfort for dozens of orphaned, homeless, and distressed young women and children. According to Clare Moore’s letter of August 26, 1845, “Little Mary Quinn [an orphan] used to sit [at table] between Revd. Mother and Mother Francis Warde.” During the 1832 cholera epidemic at least one baby was brought home in Catherine’s shawl. Again, it is

Clare Moore who tells the story of their nursing the sick and dying cholera victims:

We went early in the morning, four sisters, who were relieved by four others in two or three hours, and so on till 8 o’c in the evening. Revd. Mother was there very much. She used to go in Kirwan’s car, and once a poor woman being either lately or at the time confined and died just after of cholera, dear Revd. Mother had such compassion on the infant that she brought it home under her shawl and put it to sleep in a little bed in her own cell, but as you may guess the little thing cried all night, Revd. Mother could get no rest, so the next day it was given to someone to take care of it.

Catherine seems to have put herself in the position of those who suffer and to have felt their suffering as her own. In November 1840 she wrote in sorrow to Catherine Meagher in Naas about the widespread unemployment in Dublin and her inability to house a young woman sent to Baggot Street for shelter:

I...regret exceedingly that it is impossible to admit the young person. We are always crowded to excess [50–60 in the House of Mercy] at this season—so many leaving Dublin, dismissing servants and few engaging any. We have every day most sorrowful applications from interesting young creatures, confectioners and dressmakers, who, at this season, cannot get employment, and are quite unprotected.

I am sure I spoke with two yesterday who were hungry, tho’ of nice appearance. Their dejected faces have been before me ever since. I was afraid of hurting their feelings by offering them food and had no money (255–6).

To name the merciful work of Catherine McAuley even more precisely it is useful to study her characteristic vocabulary, the words she repeatedly used to express her purposes, values, and desires. The editorial choices she made in transcribing and composing the Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy are an especially fruitful source for such insight, as are the key words in her letters and other writings. Moreover, since her personal vocabulary indirectly influenced the wording of the early eyewitness accounts of her life, the particular words her associates repeatedly used as they reminisced about her also provide distinct insights into Catherine’s mercifulness.

Of special significance in identifying the mercifulness which was central to her character and behavior is her repeated and somewhat interchangeable use of the words “comfort” and “console.” In the extant letters she wrote to her sisters from early 1837 on, after the first foundation outside of Dublin, she frequently used these words to refer to the comfort she herself felt or desired, the comfort she wished to give others, and, especially, the comfort which God gives. “Comfort” is, I believe, Catherine’s distinctive way of naming both the effect of actively merciful relations

and work, and the profound mercifulness of God which she believed inspires and makes possible all genuine human comforting.⁵

For example, in her letters Catherine says that she could speak with James Maher (Carlow) "with all the confidence of one addressing a long well-proven friend, and such comfort does not often fall to my lot" (116-17); she anticipates the "comfort" the completed laundry will give her, in then being able to provide for the poor women in the House of Mercy (122); she notes that Andrew Fitzgerald (Carlow College) "gave me great comfort, for while he condemned the proceeding [in the Kingstown controversy], he reasoned with me so as to produce quiet of mind and heart" (125); and she admits to Frances Warde, "what a comfort it would be to have you once more one of the number" at Baggot Street (170).⁶

From Birr she writes, "We have two great comforts here, excellent bread in the Dublin household form, and pure sparkling spring water" (292); "what a comfort it gives [her] to hear of [Mary Teresa White's] continued happiness" (303); she is "greatly comforted to find all in Birr going on so well" (315); "it comforts [her] more than [she] can express to find [the novices] so initiated in the real spirit of their state" (326-7); and she is "comforted to hear that [Frances Warde's] seeming great cross is not so heavy as was apprehended" (342).

In all these instances, and others, Catherine is speaking of the human comfort which compassion and presence confer, of the solicitude which reaches out to share another's need or sorrow, and of simple human ways of standing in comforting solidarity with others. Implicit in nearly all of these instances is her personal comfort when the well-being of others is assured.

Catherine's concept of comfort and consolation was clearly biblical . . .

Because Catherine herself knew the pain of "sorrow," "humiliation," "perplexity," "bitter-sweets," "dread," "anguish," and even "bitterness," as her letters attest, she knew what comfort, consolation, and tender affection could mean to those who suffer—whether the poor, the sick and dying, or her own young sisters. She was, therefore, eager to give human comfort to others in their affliction and to assure them of the comfort God would give. She believed that "their Heavenly Father will provide comfort for [the poor of Kingstown]" (142); she assured Frances Warde that "God will send some distinguished consolation" to her in her personal affliction (341); she urged the sisters loaned from Dublin to comfort Clare

Moore when typhoid fever struck the London foundation (311); and of the poor of Charleville she wrote, "my heart felt sorrowful when I thought of the poor being deprived of the comfort which God seemed to intend for them" (138).

One of the most tender expressions of Catherine's desire to comfort is her March 21, 1840 letter to Elizabeth Moore, on the death of Mary Teresa Vincent (Ellen) Potter, a young professed sister in the Limerick community:

I did not think any event in this world could make me feel so much. I have cried heartily and implored God to comfort you. I know He will. . . . My heart is sore, not on my account nor for the sweet innocent spirit that has returned to her Heavenly Father's Bosom, but for you. You may be sure I will go see you, if it were much more out of the way, and indeed I will greatly feel the loss that will be visible on entering the Convent. Earnestly and humbly praying God to grant you His Divine consolation, and to comfort and bless all the dear Sisters, I remain, Your ever most affectionate M. C. McAuley (204).

The accounts written by Catherine's earliest associates tell numerous stories of her comforting the afflicted—of her efforts to give strength and hope, to ease grief, to lift spirits, to impart encouragement and cheer, to alter afflictive situations, and to provide safety and protection. For example, the Bermondsey Annals entry for 1841, which preserves Clare Moore's recollections, speaks of Catherine's rising in the early morning and "selecting, and transcribing from pious books, certain passages which might be useful for the instruction or consolation of the sick poor." The Annals also notes that "Her compassion led her to make the greatest sacrifices in favour of the suffering and afflicted." For example, during the cholera epidemic, "she might be seen among the dead and dying, praying by the bedside of the agonized Christian, inspiring him with sentiments of contrition for his sins, suggesting acts of resignation, hope and confidence, and elevating his heart to God by charity."

Catherine's concept of comfort and consolation was clearly biblical, and intimately related to her theology of God's Mercy and to her Christology. For her, the comfort or consolation of God was the God-given realization that human lives are, despite all affliction and apparent devastation, finally sustained and redeemed by the merciful care of God manifested in Jesus Christ and in the action of those who follow him. Catherine therefore made her own the prophetic task announced by Deutero-Isaiah and irrevocably fulfilled in Jesus: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God; speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her, that her time of service is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from Yahweh's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1-2).

In the faces of cholera victims, destitute young

girls, the dying poor, homeless unemployed women, and her own sick and dying companions, she came to know, as had Saint Paul, "the God of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1.3-4).

Catherine McAuley wished to be a paraclete, an advocate, a comforter. Though she was not a systematic theologian, aspects of what must have been her operative theology of participation in the work of the Spirit of God are evident, in fragmentary ways, throughout her writings. On a fly-leaf of her *Journal of Meditations* she had written a "Prayer Before Meditation" which begins: "Come Holy Ghost, take possession of our hearts and kindle in them the fire of thy divine love." For Catherine, this fire, which she says "Christ cast," is vibrantly active love of God and of one's neighbor, modeled on the practice of Jesus, and inspired and sustained by the Spirit of God.

I believe Catherine McAuley knew, at her own "side," the power and presence of this Spirit . . .

As W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* points out, *parakletos*, meaning literally, "called to one's side," was "used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defense, an advocate; then, generally, one who pleads another's cause.... In the widest sense, it signifies a succourer, comforter" (200). Jesus was such a counselor and he promised "another Counselor" (John 14.16), the Spirit of Truth assured to his disciples in John 14.26, 15.26, and 16.7. I believe Catherine McAuley knew, at her own "side," the power and presence of this Spirit, and that she therefore knew herself explicitly called to be the human voice, hands, and feet of this comforting Counselor, literally, at the side and in the defense of the poor and afflicted.⁷

In an important set of letters written during Catherine's last illness, Mary Vincent Whitty, then twenty-two years old, records Catherine's last use of the word "comfort." Writing to Mary Cecilia Marmion in Birmingham, on November 12, 1841, the day after Catherine's death, Mary Vincent relates a scene at Catherine's bedside the day before:

She told Sr. Teresa [Carton], now fearing I might forget it again, will you tell the Srs. to get a good cup of tea—I think the Community room would be a good place—when I am gone and to comfort one another—but God will comfort them—she said to

*me, if you give yourself entirely to God—all you have to serve him, every power of your mind and heart—you will have a consolation you will not know where it comes from.*⁸

In this, her final human act of comforting, the merciful character of Catherine McAuley is displayed with remarkable simplicity and homeliness. The same practical alertness to others' needs that had marked her entire life, the same life-long recognition that human beings must actively comfort one another, and the same abiding conviction that, finally, all comfort comes from God are here concentrated in a "cup of tea" for those who grieve.

Animating the Human Spirit

The outstanding feature of Catherine McAuley's behavior precisely as a founder was not that she was outstanding, though she was. Rather it was her animation of the zeal of her companions. Her collaborative, supportive mode of ecclesial leadership was, in many important respects, a new and feminine model of ecclesial administration. She was willing to work with and defer to what her associates brought to their common efforts, even when their talents or knowledge or courage might have seemed less than what was needed at the moment; she was willing to learn from them and with them as the decade unfolded; she suffered with them and took her place at their side, in poverty, uncertainty, sickness, and death; and she made herself, gradually and finally, completely dispensable to their work and to their future. In all this, her one unique and irreplaceable contribution as their founder was to animate them—that is, continually to remind them of the true spirit of what they were about, and to kindle, by every human means in her power, the God-given life and desire that was already in them.

Catherine wrote often about the "true spirit" of the order, the quintessential spirit of their common religious project. For her this vital spirit was the love of God, the fundamental life-reality which gave strength and purpose to all the human particulars of their life and work. Its source was God's merciful blessing; its two external manifestations were their own union and charity and their mercifulness toward others. Writing at Easter in 1841 to her close friend Elizabeth Moore, Catherine rejoiced in the spirit of the young women who were preparing for reception of the habit and profession of vows at Baggot Street:

All are good and happy. The blessing of unity still dwells amongst us and oh what a blessing, it should make all things else pass into nothing. All laugh and play together, not one cold, stiff soul appears. From the day they enter, all reserve of any ungracious kind leaves them. This is the spirit of the Order, indeed the true spirit of Mercy flowing on us.... (330-31)

Catherine believed that this warm, free, gracious spirit was of divine origin. It was God's own animat-

ing gift to the community and to those they served, if they would but yield to it, treasure it, and act upon it. It was, she believed, "some of the fire [Christ] cast on the earth—kindling" (226). Catherine refers twice to this verse in Luke's Gospel (12.49) when describing the young English women preparing for the foundation in Birmingham:

They are all that is promising—every mark of real solid vocation—most edifying at all times, at recreation the gayest of the gay. They seem so far to have corresponded very faithfully with the graces received as each day there appears increased fervour and animation.... They renew my poor spirit greatly—five creatures fit to adorn society coming forward joyfully to consecrate themselves to the service of the poor for Christ's sake. This is some of the fire He cast on the earth—kindling. (226)

Catherine believed that the true spirit of the Sisters of Mercy was the animation given to their human spirits by God's own Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Consequently, she believed that her unique obligation as their founder was to support and nurture this animation. Every lecture she gave, every journey she took, and every letter she wrote to her sisters was to encourage and sustain this animation. Thus in October 1837, for example—two months after the death of her niece Catherine and while Mary de Chantal McCann lay dying in Kingstown—Catherine wrote from Cork to Frances Warde, who was herself grieving the death of her bishop a week before: "I will return by Carlow to see you, if only for a few hours.... May God bless and animate you with His own divine spirit that you may prove it is Jesus Christ you love and serve with your whole heart" (101–2).

"Animation" was the word Catherine repeatedly used to designate the effect of God's merciful action in human hearts and the power of Jesus' example.

Just as "comfort" or "console" was a characteristic word in Catherine's personal vocabulary, so was "animate," the verb and its adjectival and noun forms. "Animation" was the word Catherine repeatedly used to designate the effect of God's merciful action in human hearts and the power of Jesus' example. To be animated by the Spirit of Christ was to manifest all the God-given and humanly sustained liveliness of the true spirit of the order: the spirit of mutual love and

service of the poor.

Thus she urged Frances Warde, even in her sorrow, to be "cheerful and happy, animating all around you" (118); and she told Elizabeth Moore, "I ought to say all that could animate and comfort you, for you are a credit and a comfort to me" (167). On the eve of their departure for Bermondsey, she found Clare Moore "all animation" (177); and she imagined "what renewed animation and strength" the return of sisters would bring to "poor old" Baggot Street (234). She treasured the newcomer Frances Gibson, "a sweet docile animated creature, all alive and delighted with her duties" (354); she believed that each return visit to a new foundation "animates the new beginners, and gives confidence to others" (331); and, about six weeks before her death, she urged Juliana Hardman, the young superior of Birmingham, to "pray fervently for those animating graces which will lead us on in uniform peace, making the yoke of our Dear Redeemer easy" (379).

Catherine had, it must be admitted, a natural preference for out-going warmth, swift action, and liveliness. She complained that Clare Augustine Moore, an artist, was too slow-moving, having taken all day to paint "3 rose or lily leaves" (312); she worried that a prospective postulant, a former Carmelite, "is not half alive" and "If it is arranged, I shall have a nice task opening the [downcast] eyes of the little Carmelite" (312); and she once wished that the Tullamore community were not "such creep-mouses" about starting new foundations.

But the animation which she particularly sought and prayed for was a much deeper reality: the vivacious generosity of spirit made possible by the Spirit of God, giving her companions an "ardent desire to understand perfectly the obligations of religious life and to enter into the real spirit of their state" (319). While Catherine understood that all her associates were responsible, before God, for nurturing and encouraging the continuation of this God-given "animation," she seems to have recognized that she personally had a special and explicit obligation to exemplify and promote this first quickening, by her own zeal. She was the "founder" of the Sisters of Mercy precisely in this vivifying sense: she recognized and named the animating gift of God; she continually gave life, spirit, and support to the fruit of that gift; she used every opportunity to cheer and invigorate her sisters; and she deliberately nurtured their God-given charity and zeal. In a word, she *animated* them—by her words, her example, her presence, her affection, and her own concrete commitment to the works of mercy.

Although Clare Augustine Moore claims: "I cannot say that our dear foundress had a talent for education; she doted on children and invariably spoiled them," all the eye-witness accounts of Catherine's first associates suggest that she was a very effective teacher of the women who were her companions. It is remark-

able how precisely they remember and treasure her "sayings" and instructions. Catherine was convinced that "we learn more by example than by precept," but she also had a keen sense of the animating value of inspiring verbal instruction. She seems to have regarded the oral instructions she regularly gave to the community, especially to the novices, and the public spiritual reading which she chose for them as very important means of animating the spirit that was already alive within them.

Therefore the daily schedule of the Baggot Street community included a period of time in the morning for "Lecture," before the day's work began. At this time Catherine gave formal spiritual instructions to the community, either by reading from a book of her choice, by reading from a transcription they had made, or simply by speaking directly to them, with or without notes. In addition, she gave regular instruction to all the postulants and novices during the four years (1831-1835) when she retained for herself the role of Mistress of Novices, and she personally guided their daily meditations during their retreats prior to reception and profession. Although she usually tried to arrange for a priest to be the resident director for the community's annual August retreat, on at least one occasion Catherine herself gave this retreat. In a letter to Frances Warde in early August 1841, she wryly refers to her upcoming role: "'Father' McAuley conducts the retreat in poor Baggot St." (360).

As the Bermondsey Annals reports, Catherine's themes for these instructions were those which animated her own spirit, the great themes of the Gospel derived from Jesus' own life and instructions:

Her exhortations were most animating and impressive especially on the duties of humility and charity. These were her characteristic virtues, and on St. Paul's description of charity she loved to expatiate, most earnestly striving to reduce it to practise herself, and to induce all under her charge to do the same. She loved all and sought to do good to all, but the poor and little children were her special favourites; these she laboured to instruct, relieve and console in every possible way. She taught the Sisters to avoid all that might be in the least contrary to charity, even the slightest remark on manner, natural defects, etc. so that they should make it a rule never to say anything unfavourable of each other. She was not content with their avoiding the smallest faults against this favourite virtue of our Blessed Lord, she wished their whole conduct should evince that this virtue reigned in their hearts.... Her lessons on charity and humility being supported by her own unvarying example necessarily made a deep impression on the minds of her spiritual children.

The Bermondsey annalist also notes how Catherine used casual occasions to develop ideas that were important to the vital spirit of the community.

For example, the Annals records her frequent commentary on the Rule at evening recreation:

She loved to expatiate on certain words. "Our mutual respect and charity is to be 'cordial'—now 'cordial' signifies something that revives, invigorates, and warms; such should be the effects of our love for each other." Mercy was a word of predilection with her. She would point out the advantages of Mercy above Charity. "The Charity of God would not avail us, if His Mercy did not come to our assistance. Mercy is more than Charity—for it not only bestows benefits, but it receives and pardons again and again—even the ungrateful."

The Limerick Manuscript, following in part the wording of the Bermondsey Annals, speaks of Catherine's human understanding, and of the animating quality of her voice:

She did not possess worldly accomplishments but she had read much and her manners were most pleasing and agreeable. She had an extensive knowledge of the human heart and could readily adapt her conversation to the wants of those by whom she was surrounded. Everything in her she rendered subservient to the Divine Honour and her neighbour's good, for she never seemed to think or care for herself. Her method of reading was so delightful that all used acknowledge it rendered quite new to them a subject which perhaps they had frequently heard before.

Not all of Catherine McAuley's instructions were public or verbal. The eye-witness accounts of her life are threaded with instances of private accommodation to another's frame of mind and indirect teaching through example. The Bermondsey Annals recounts an incident that Clare Moore could have learned only from the one who experienced Catherine's apology:

One act of self abasement which occurred within the last four years of her life ought not to be passed over in silence; it was related with tears by the Sister who was the subject of it to a friend. She had spoken, as she thought, rather sharply to her, and a few hours after she went to the Sister and asked her did she remember who had been present at the time. As several had been there, the Sister answered she could hardly say, for she had not noticed which they were, but as our Reverend Mother requested her to try and call them to mind and bring them to her, they were summoned, and when all assembled our dear Reverend Mother humbly knelt down, and begged her forgiveness for the manner in which she had spoken to her that morning.

Even on her deathbed Catherine taught her sisters the necessity of complete charity. For some reason, perhaps associated with his long-standing support of the Irish Sisters of Charity and with what he took to be Catherine's competition with them, Dean Walter

Meyler, who became parish priest of Saint Andrew's in 1833, was, as Clare Augustine Moore puts it, "not friendly." Their relationship worsened during their prolonged chaplaincy controversy. Clare Augustine, who was present in Baggot Street at the time, recounts the details:

One of the first things he did was to forbid the 2nd Mass on Sundays, which cut off a great resource for the charity, and he tried not to have the Charity Sermon preached in the Parish Church, but the Archbishop decided it was to be so. Many other trials sprang from the same source.... He then refused [in 1837] to let the Institution have a chaplain of its own, proposing to have the duty performed by one of the clergymen attached to St. Andrew's. Poor Foundress, who foresaw the inconvenience of such an arrangement, refused to acquiesce, and he at once put an interdict on the chapel, so that for some months we daily, and the young women on days of obligation, went out to Mass. After almost two months, he with much difficulty permitted Fr. Colgan, O.C.C.,...to say Mass and give Holy Communion on Christmas Day; but as he declared he would not renew the permission she had to yield, and plenty of inconveniences, especially as regarded confessions of the school children, we had to endure.

Catherine's most forceful letters are about this controversy. She complained in writing to John Hamilton, Archdeacon of Dublin, and to Dean Meyler himself, from whom she received on December 19, 1837 such a painful letter that she says she burned it immediately after reading only part of it (Bolster 43-44). She suffered greatly from the Dean's intransigence and, as she admitted in a letter to Frances Warde, she struggled to be free of all "bitterness" (129).

Yet as Catherine lay dying on November 11, 1841, she was visited by a number of priests, including Dean Meyler. Mary Vincent Whitty, who had entered Baggot Street in 1839, was at Catherine's bedside. Though she may not have realized the full import of what she saw and heard, the older members of the community who were with her surely did. The next day Mary Vincent wrote about the scene she had witnessed, as Catherine asked Walter Meyler's forgiveness: "She begged Dr. Meyler's pardon yesterday—if she ever did or said anything to displease him—he said she ought not to think of that now & promised, I will take care & do all I can for your spiritual children—she looked at him so pleased & said, will you—then May God help & reward you for it."

In her Rule Catherine had urged her sisters to preserve the bonds of union and charity established by Jesus Christ, and to extend that Mercy to others. In the final hours of her life, when giving spiritual lectures was no longer possible for her, she continued to animate her sisters by the means which she had always

considered most persuasive: the powerful, lasting animation afforded by human example.⁹

Hearing Catherine McAuley Today

Writing to Mary Cecilia Marmion on Friday, November 12, 1841, Mary Vincent Whitty speaks of the special privilege that was hers the night before: "I had the consolation for it is the pleasing though melancholy consolation to read the last prayers for her, close her eyes & that mouth from which I have received such instructions."

In the renewal of spirit and action in which Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and their associates are now earnestly engaged, guided by the Direction Statement of the Institute, we are, I believe, called to hear and practice in a more urgent way Catherine's instructions, perhaps especially those about comforting and animating.

If we were to think of ourselves as explicitly called to the deliberate work of *comforting the afflicted*:

- We might, for example, rise each morning determined to search out the most severely afflicted, hidden in the folds of each day's encounters, and to offer them real comfort in conscious, tangible ways.
- We might see ourselves as especially called to be comforting advocates of and presences with the afflicted ones whose paths lie outside our daily map and whose by-ways we must seek out.
- We might examine our conversations, activities, use of time, and use of material resources in terms of the extent to which they, in fact, give comfort to the afflicted.
- We might consciously prefer to visit places where people are suffering, over places for our own pleasure, and would gradually shift the center of our personal gravity from situations in which we are comforted to situations crying out for the comforting we can give.
- We might publicly and systematically defend the afflicted against the powers and designs which afflict them, denouncing those afflictive structures and working to correct or remove them.
- We might explicitly ask ourselves at the end of each day: "By whose afflicted side did I stand in deliberate solidarity today, and what did I do to comfort her, him, or them?"

If we were to think of ourselves as called, precisely, to the profound work of *animating human spirits*:

- We might regard every encounter and action in the course of our days as directed chiefly to this explicit purpose: to help enkindle and sustain the hope, trust, and love which is the Spirit's live-giving presence within all people.
- We might animate and inspire one another by speaking more openly about the Christian realities which personally animate and inspire us: we might talk about these realities with less reticence and privacy.

- We might find, in our relations with co-workers and those we serve, sensitive ways to speak of God and Jesus (Christ), so as not to let weeks and months go by without giving an account of the hope that is alive within us, or of our gratefulness for and confidence in God's Mercy.
- We might be, quite plainly, cheerful and cheer-bestowing, because the "good news" which animates us and can animate others is profoundly cheering, even when other "news" is heart-rending.
- We might regard "religious education," broadly and deeply understood, as the quintessential ministry of each of us, whatever our job descriptions or locations.
- We might defend God's living presence in all its vital human forms, and work against non-life-giving practices and systemic death-dealing wherever they occur.
- We might be ourselves deliberately animated by the practice of Jesus, and explicitly offer his example for the animation of others.

If we were to give ourselves to some such focused personal renewal, would we not re-create the original spirit of our Institute in so vigorous a way that we would be as lively and zealous as Catherine's "first-born" who, as she said, "renew my poor spirit greatly" (226)?

Footnotes

1. While I regret certain over-simplifications and generalizations in their treatment of women religious, I applaud what Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser have done for our knowledge of the history of women in Europe, in their two-volume *A History of Their Own* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). A comparable work remains to be written for women in church history. Towards this end, scholarly research on the life and work of Catherine McAuley can contribute eventually to a fuller accounting of nineteenth-century Irish church history, and church history in general.
2. Frequent reference is made in this essay to several early biographical manuscripts and letters about Catherine McAuley written by her earliest associates, as well as to entries in the Annals of certain early foundations. I here wish to thank the particular archivists, assistant archivists or other sisters for their gracious help to me and to note with respect their fidelity to caring for the documents of our heritage: Sisters Teresa Green (Bermondsey), Norah Boland (Brisbane), Nessa Cullen (Carlow), Mary Paschal Murray (Derry), Mary Magdalena Frisby (Dublin)—who has long borne a special responsibility, with great wisdom and solicitude—Mary Pierre O'Connor (Limerick), and Mary Celestine (Tullamore).
3. References to the Rule are to Catherine McAuley's handwritten manuscript, preserved in the archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin. Chapter and article (paragraph) numbers are noted in parentheses, separated by a period.
4. In this essay references to Catherine's letters are generally to the edition of Mary Ignatia Neumann, RSM, *The*

Letters of Catherine McAuley (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), and thus only page numbers are given in parentheses. Where the reference is to the edition of Mary Angela Bolster, RSM, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley* (Cork and Ross: Sisters of Mercy, 1989), this is noted in the parentheses.

5. In her excellent article, "Towards a Theology of Mercy," in *The MAST* [Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology] *Journal* 2 (Spring 1992), 1–8, Mary Ann Scofield, RSM, provides a fine analysis of the conception of Mercy-doing which must have inspired and directed Catherine McAuley. In the present article, where I focus on the language of "comforting," I wish only to offer another way of naming the mercifulness which characterized Catherine's attitudes and behavior—by using a word she used more frequently than "merciful" or "mercy." The words and concepts Sisters of Mercy use to express our most fundamental convictions and commitments can, by very reason of the frequency with which we use them, grow overly familiar and so lose some of their power to inspire us. This can happen with the word, "mercy," which signifies such rich biblical and historical realities. Perhaps reflection on "comforting the afflicted" can renew our grasp of certain aspects of the mercifulness which is the founding charism of our Institute.

6. *The Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that the current meanings of the word, "comfort"—as well as of the word, "animate," to be discussed later—were also the standard meanings of these words in the early nineteenth century when Catherine McAuley used them.

7. Sallie McFague's *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) offers a persuasive interpretation of the modes of God's presence in and toward the world "as mother [parent], lover, and friend of the last and least in all creation" (91). While McFague does not explicitly name any of her three models "Comforter," her experimental presentation of these three metaphors of God—to represent God's "creative, salvific and sustaining" love, activity and ethic—can immensely enrich our understanding of the scriptural presentation of the "God of all comfort" who effects and sustains "the consolation of Israel."

8. This eye-witness account is the earliest source of the "good cup of tea" tradition, which Mary Austin Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley* (New York: Sadlier, 1890), later records as a "comfortable cup of tea" (437). Carroll's work was first published in 1866.

9. Portions of this essay are taken from two chapters in the book on Catherine McAuley which I am completing for publication. The book will contain the texts of early biographical manuscripts about Catherine, as well as the text of Catherine's original manuscript for the first Rule and Constitutions, together with extensive notes and commentary on its composition. I distributed the text of the First Part of the Rule and my end notes on it at the Governing Board Meeting of the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, in Manchester, New Hampshire on June 24, 1989.

Catherine McAuley's Original Rule and Her Understanding of the Order of Mercy

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Catherine McAuley wrote little in a formal way about the nature of the Institute she began. Her original rule for the Sisters of Mercy is an adaptation of the Rule of the Congregation of the Presentation of Our Blessed Lady written in 1805.¹ To find Catherine's understanding of religious life one must reflect on changes she made in adapting the Rule of the Presentation Sisters for the order she founded.²

Catherine's Adaptations

Catherine's adaptation of the Presentation Rule takes three forms; the insertions of chapters describing the particular works of the Sisters of Mercy, a change in the ordering of the chapters from the order of the Presentation Rule, additions and omissions of words, phrases, sections. Catherine's views and intent are most clearly expressed in the chapters she herself composed on the visitation of the sick and the admission of distressed women of good character. These were not part of the Presentation Rule, since the Presentation Order was devoted to the education of "poor female children." Catherine's ordering of the chapters differs from that in the Presentation Rule. She may have felt she had more leeway with rearranging the text in order to describe the type of institute the Sisters of Mercy should be than she did in altering the wording of any section. Evidently the Archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, felt that the rule would be more readily approved the closer it adhered to an already approved rule.³ Catherine made other lesser changes throughout the text which reveal her understanding of what she envisioned for the Sisters of Mercy.

This paper will examine Catherine's description of the works of the Sisters of Mercy, the order in which she arranged the chapters of the rule and some of the additions and deletions she made in the remaining material. Finally, it will offer reflections on Catherine's intent as revealed in these portions of her rule.

The Work of the Institute

Catherine's own thought is most clearly evident in the section of the rule on ministry. Chapters 2 through 4 deal with the schools, the visitation of the sick and the admission of distressed women. The chapter on the schools is adapted from the Presentation Rule while the other two are Catherine's own composition.

While chapter 2, which was originally united with Chapter 1, is substantially the same as in the Presentation Rule, some of the changes made are significant. Catherine's language is simpler and more

direct throughout. She greatly simplifies directions for spiritual instructions and adds explicit reference to teaching a method for assisting at Eucharist. Catherine changes the period of silence that the Presentation Rule had set aside for the sisters' examen to a time for the sisters to instruct the children in making a particular examen, thus giving priority to the ministry rather than to the sisters' spiritual exercises. She then changes the half-hour prescribed by the Presentation Rule for "spiritual lecture out of some instructive book" to a "general instruction adapted to their state and capacity and rendered practically useful by explanation."⁴ She omits entirely the detailed directions for administering the schools.

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Article 5 is entirely Catherine's own composition and witnesses to the value she placed on the instruction of women and to the role she saw women playing in their spheres of influence.

*The Sisters shall feel convinced that no work of charity can be so productive of good to society, or so conducive to the happiness of the Poor as than the careful instruction of women, since however whatever be the station they are destined to fill, their example and advice will always possess influence, and wherever a religious woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.*⁵

She saw beyond the benefit received by the individuals instructed to the benefit received by society. The reference to "a religious woman" in the final sentence may indicate Catherine's sense of collaboration and unity with those she served. "Religious woman" does not seem to be a title restricted to sisters.

It is above all in the chapter on the visitation of the sick that Catherine's own views on the Institute are evident. It is the longest chapter in the rule having eleven articles. The first three lay the theological and spiritual foundation for this and indeed every work of Mercy, even the Institute itself. The remaining seven describe in practical terms the manner of the visitation and give further insight into Catherine's own spirituality from whence these insights most evidently flowed.

In this chapter Catherine's language is exuberant and lavish in contrast to the reserve she maintains in other sections. In reading the chapter, one is struck by the strength and vitality of Catherine's expression from the opening proclamation in article 1, "Mercy", to the conclusion in article 11 where all that has been accomplished in the visit is returned to God's own glory, the salvation of the sisters and those whom they have instructed. The text gives the reader the sense that the author is a prayerful person, one grounded in God, skilled in the ministry of caring for the sick, well able to address the interplay of their corporal needs with attention to their spiritual needs. The visit is surrounded by prayer, in preparing for it, in attending to the spiritual wants of the sick and also in completing it. Catherine instructs the sisters to pray that the visit may benefit their own souls as well as the souls of those visited.⁵

Mercy is the path by which one follows Jesus.

The chapter opens with a proclamation of Mercy as the principal path pointed out by Jesus to those who are desirous of following him. The language is direct and strong. For Catherine, Mercy is everything. It is mercy that through all the ages of the Church has moved the faithful to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor. It is the faithful not simply religious who have responded to this call. She gives the reason for their response as simply that in the poor they regarded "the person of our Divine Master."⁷ In support of this she cites Matthew 25 as she did in C. 1, a. 1.

Catherine continues in part 2 to strengthen the motivation of the sisters to this work of Mercy by citing our savior's great tenderness for the sick evidenced in his miraculous cures and in the healing power given to the Apostles. Catherine then lists a number of holy men and women distinguished for devoting their lives to "this work of Mercy." Her own excitement is evident in the concluding sentence of this article:

*"Such bright examples and the great recompense promised must be strong motives for the Sisters of this Holy Institute, to fulfill with fervor and delight, every part of this meritorious duty."*⁸

Absent from the text is any sense of heaviness or burden. Brightness, fervor, delight and merit take their place. Such an attitude expresses a reverential quality which may be what prompted Catherine to refer to the Institute as holy since it carries out so awesome and holy a "duty." Only in this article does Catherine refer to the Institute as holy.

In article 3, Catherine's original wording encour-

aged the Sisters to gratitude and love because they were assisting Christ in his labors. Archbishop Murray changed this to focus attention on the service to Christ in the person of the poor. This was Catherine's focus in article 1. In article 3 Catherine exhorts the sisters to place full confidence in Christ and his assistance as they labor with him remaining always conscious of the example of his patience and humility. She exhorts them to the imitation of Christ, that they may gain "a crown of Glory." She concludes with an interesting insight. Because they are merciful the sisters will gain the title of Children of the Most High. To be merciful is to be child of God. It is God, the Source of Mercy, who begets Mercy.

What we see in these three articles is the central emphasis in Catherine's understanding and practice of the works of mercy. Mercy is the path by which one follows Jesus. For her he is Mercy given and received. The sick and dying poor are his. To minister to them is to minister to him. It is here then that the sisters meet Christ. Catherine encourages them to this consciousness of the union of all in Christ. Thus in article 6 Catherine cautions the sisters to be recollected as they pass through the streets, "going forward as if they expected to meet their Divine Redeemer in each poor habitation, since He has said: 'Where two etc. etc. are in my name I will be.'"

One important awareness contained in these articles is that the sisters labor with Christ, assisting him in his labors on behalf of the poor. The works of Mercy are not their works but God's. This consciousness is the source of energy and freedom. One relies not on oneself but on God.

Crucial in the spiritual journey is the moment when one hands over to God all one's endeavors, realizing that one's own efforts apart from God have accomplished and can accomplish nothing. It is the realization that this is God's world, God accomplishes its salvation, that it is God who acts within and through each one in doing all that is good.⁹

Thus Catherine enjoyed freedom of spirit in accomplishing the works of mercy. In tune with God in whom she dwelt, she moved forward with works and moved back from them as circumstances dictated. The poor always remained God's poor and though she was called to serve them, their care was basically God's affair.¹⁰

The eight articles which follow describe with energy and great sensitivity the manner in which the sisters are to go about the visitation. Catherine's suggestions are practical. One gets the sense of the writer's skill in this ministry,¹¹ of her familiarity with the condition and ways of the poor,¹² of her balancing corporal and spiritual ministration and of knowing the connection between them.¹³ The visit is surrounded by prayer in an awareness of the interrelatedness of action and prayer and of the God who ministers and is ministered to in both the sick and the server.

One cannot miss the human qualities which Catherine encourages in the sisters. Article 5 and 6 describe the sisters' composure when going through the streets as if, as noted above, they expected to meet their Divine Redeemer. In the visitation itself, she calls for great tenderness in their care, for someone who can read aloud well, who can "choose suitable passages and speak in an easy, soothing impressive manner so as not to embarrass or fatigue the poor patient."¹⁴

In the rather lengthy article 9, Catherine instructs the sisters to show strongly their concern for the spiritual well being of the sick in order to lead them to repent. Here her language becomes intense. She wants the sisters to have a passion for the conversion of those lax in the practice of their faith. In cases of spiritual neglect the sisters are "to create alarm."

"They should add the strongest entreaties with evident deep concern, for if our own hearts are not affected in vain should we hope to affect theirs, above all to pray in an audible voice and most earnest emphatic manner, that God may look with pity on His poor creatures and bring them to repentance."

This will, she notes, most likely dispose them for a good confession.¹⁵ No remote, cool ministration does Catherine have in mind but rather one in which the Sisters are actively engaged with the sick and dying poor in the quest for eternal life.

Catherine makes clear that the Sisters meet Christ in their ministry, in the performance of the works of mercy . . .

Her instructions in article 10 for ministry to the dying show great concern for their welfare. All is to be done to enable the dying person to conclude this life in peace and union with God without anxiety over any unfinished business.

The chapter closes with the instruction on returning the work to God in a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. For Catherine ministry sends one to prayer, in gratitude for God's protection, in greater awareness of one's limitations and gifts, and a return of them to God with the desire that all "may conduce to His own Glory, the salvation of their souls, and of those whom they have instructed." It is interesting to note that Catherine considers that the sisters have "instructed" the sick, not simply attended their physical ailments. For her it is an opportunity for a meeting in faith.

The chapter on the admission of distressed women, like the chapter on the visitation of the sick,

emphasizes "instructing in the principal Mysteries of Religion" the women admitted to the House of Mercy. This first article stresses the importance of a return to the Sacraments for those who may have been neglectful and a willing acceptance of the obligations of "the circumstances in which God has placed them."¹⁶

Catherine's practical experience comes to the fore in the second article where she speaks with realism of preparing the women for suitable employment and fitting them to positions for which they have been trained. She notes that "many leave their situations not so much for want of merit as incapacity to fulfill the duties they unwisely engaged in."¹⁷ Here again Catherine shows an understanding and sensitivity to the people she serves.

In concern for their welfare she cautions against remaining too long in the House of Mercy as "it will generally be found to be more conducive to their good to get them soon into the state and employment by which they are to live."¹⁸ Yet in the next article she speaks of the necessity of allowing the "daughters of reduced tradesmen" to be admitted "on the recommendation of a pious orderly woman" and "allowed to remain in the House of Mercy until practiced in servitude, and entitled to character from the Institution."¹⁹ Here we again see Catherine's sensitivity and understanding of two different sets of circumstances, that of the daughters of urban families falling on hard times and that of untrained young rural women seeking employment in the city.

These insights into the employment sought and length of time at the House of Mercy are practical and may well arise out of Catherine's experience as Article 3 on the required "testimonials as to character and distress" certainly does.

All of these prescriptions, for the school, for the visitation of the sick and dying, for the distressed women, reveal Catherine as a practical person centered in Christ who wrote out of her experience in serving others, out of her knowledge of human nature and her respect for her associates. She responded to a deep sense of call in commitment to the God for whom she trod this path.

Catherine's Order of the Text

The fact that Catherine made so few changes in her adaptation of the text of the Presentation Rule makes all the more remarkable her change in the order in which her rule takes up the various topics concerning religious life. The Presentation Rule opens with a description of the purpose of the congregation and a description of its work. Catherine does the same, inserting here her own chapters on the visitation of the sick and the admission of distressed women. The Presentation Rule then considers the vows, Enclosure and the Admission of Postulants, Office and Mental Prayer, Spiritual Retreat, Confession, Communion and various virtues and practices pertaining to the spiritual

life of the religious. Catherine does something different which may indicate her understanding of the newness of what she saw coming into existence in the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine placed the two chapters on the perfection of ordinary actions and the employment of time immediately after her description of the work of the Institute. In her description of the visitation of the sick, Catherine makes clear that the Sisters meet Christ in their ministry, in the performance of the works of mercy, and that here, as co-laborers with and ministers to Christ they grow in sanctity (i.e. in her words, "receive their reward").

The religious life she describes is not monasticism. Rather than a removal from their surroundings the Sisters of Mercy are sent into the neighborhoods in which they live to minister to the needs of others. In order for them to realize the purpose of the order, their own sanctification as well as the service of others, it is necessary that the sisters bring the awareness of faith to their doing of the works of Mercy. To foster this faith consciousness Catherine places the chapter, Of the Perfection of Ordinary Actions, immediately following the chapters on ministry. In an apostolic religious life, union with Christ in God must include the consciousness of union with him in those served. The awareness of God's presence in the ministry both in those served and those serving is crucial or the sisters will miss opportunities for growth in Christ, their religious life will be empty and barren, their ministry devoid of the life of the Spirit.

The service of the poor is what called Catherine to agree to the founding of the order.

Catherine found the means to this consciousness described in the Presentation Rule chapters, Of the Perfection of Ordinary Actions and Of the Employment of Time. She places them following the description of the works of the Institute. In doing this she draws into unity the two purposes of the order, the perfection of the members and the service of others.

Catherine then groups together the chapters dealing with interior virtues and those about religious exercises. The Presentation Rule treats these in no special order. After these occur two chapters on the devotions proper to the Institute followed by the chapters on the vows and on enclosure.

Through the order which Catherine gives to the chapters of the rule she indicates what is important for an apostolic religious congregation. The service of the poor is what called Catherine to agree to the founding

of the order. This then takes preeminent place in the rule and sets the reason for what follows. Seeing the service of the poor as service of and with Christ, Catherine takes care to foster this same faith among the sisters by placing next the chapters on perfection of ordinary actions and employment of time. This placement preserves a manner of service which enables the members to meet Christ in the poor and which saves the poor from being simply objects of benevolence.

The subsequent chapters on the virtues, spiritual exercises and devotion may be seen as fostering the minister's growth in Christ. The chapters on the vows then complete the description of the Sister of Mercy as one who pledges herself to put on Christ in the service of others. A profound sense of union with and growth in Christ can be seen to result from the ordering.

Ministry

Changes that Catherine makes in reference to the works of mercy remove any sense of burdensomeness from what she emphasizes is a privileged and meritorious task. Indeed performance of the works of Mercy is a spiritual exercise that removes any necessity for adding days of fast to the spiritual practices of the sisters.

Catherine removes from the rule any references to those she served which might be sentimental or condescending. She identifies the sisters as "us poor Christians". Her spirit of contemplation enabled her to see both the poor and the members of the Institute as they are, neither romanticizing the plight of the one nor exalting the virtue of the other.

The overarching theme of Catherine's ministry to the poor whether in the schools, the visitation of the sick or the protection of distressed women seems to be instruction — instruction suiting them to life in the circumstances that they could realistically expect, to life in good standing with the Church, to the practice of their religion and to their union with God.

In summary, the changes in the texts referring to ministry accent the privilege of participating in the works of mercy, minimize the difficulties involved, avoid romanticism of the poor and emphasize instruction for life here and hereafter.

The Vows

In her treatment of the vows, Catherine makes significant changes from the Presentation Rule not only by placing them almost at the end of Part I, but also by her deletions and additions. In general Catherine's changes in the sections on the vows soften the ascetical focus on mortification or abnegation found in the Presentation Rule. She also deletes any phrases which seem to emphasize the authority of the superior or make that authority arbitrary or dominating. She likewise omits phrases which might seem to reduce the dignity of the human spirit through unnecessary subju-

gation.

Catherine had a non-monastic concept of obedience. The superior did not hold the place of spiritual mother of the community in the same sense that an abbess did. She did not function as spiritual director for the sisters. Nor did the surrender of one's will to God mean the handing over of all judgment and decision-making to the superior. In carrying out the works of mercy, the sisters had to make judgments and decisions. Assuredly Catherine's experience as a laywoman, gathering with other women for the service of the poor, led her to articulate a way of life and a theology of obedience that would direct energy to building community among the sisters and to fostering the service of the poor.

While Catherine called for a "separation from the world" and a religious demeanor in her sisters in the chapter on chastity, this did not mean the rigorous denying of the human spirit. By omitting any such proscriptions, she emphasizes rather the strength of virtue of the Sisters arising from the interior life, the faith vision of life in Christ, rather than an avoidance of occasions of sin. The Sisters of Mercy must take prudent risks because for the sake of Christ they are called to meet and serve the poor in their own circumstances.

The Deportment of the Sisters

The changes Catherine makes in the Presentation Rule in regard to the behavior of the sisters express her view that the sisters be and be perceived as human persons with genuine feelings. She usually omits any wording that would reduce the simple, natural dignity of the sisters. This is true in her treatment of the vows, in her description of the demeanor of the sisters, in the detailed instructions for the moving exhortation to conversion of life for the sick. In other places the insertion or deletion of a word supports Catherine's warm view of human nature. She exhorted the sisters in the visitation of the sick to act with what is certainly passion. She tells them "They should add the strongest entreaties with evident deep concern, for if our own hearts are not affected in vain should we hope to affect theirs." She did not seem to fear passion as much as apathy and stiffness.

Summary and Conclusion

We see that although Catherine made extensive use of the Presentation Rule of 1805 as the basis for her own, through the changes she made she conveys her idea of the nature of this new Order of Mercy and the spirituality for its members. We have considered how this was done in the sections she herself composed, through her rearrangement of the order of the chapters, and in the omissions and changes in the wording of various articles, particularly those dealing with authority, the ministry, the vows, the manners of the sisters and their relation to each other.

Catherine put together a rule for a non-monastic, apostolic religious congregation. A rule for an apostolic institute dedicated to the works of mercy might have been achieved through a flexible understanding of the chapter on enclosure, through the placement of this section in a non prominent part at the end of Part I or even by following Daniel Murray's suggestion and omitting this chapter. However Catherine's sense of the different type of religious group moved her to make a more thorough adaptation writing a rule more expressive of a life lived in dedication to the service of others outside the structures of monastic religious life.

By her succinct description of the work proper to the Order in article 2 of chapter 1, Catherine highlights and strengthens the sense of ministry as the reason for the gathering of women as Sisters of Mercy. Her vivid exhortations in chapter 3 on the visitation of the sick give further emphasis and clarity to the service of mercy as "the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following him." Catherine is able to convey in her rule what she had lived for so many years; the apostolic service of the poor had shaped her life in conformity to Christ.

Catherine also has a sense of authority and of the role of the superior that is more suited to an order devoted to service. The role of the superior is to coordinate the activities and life of the Institute for service. The superior does not replace the sisters as sole maker of decisions or judgments. She is not the spiritual director of the order nor is she to be a figure commanding awe and external ceremonies of reverence.

Catherine values the flexibility needed for ministry.

Catherine desires that the sisters relate to authority in a loving and respectful manner. She wants them to relate to each other in the same way with no stiffness or rigidity. Their affection for each other should be genuine. Their behavior both in the convent and on the streets should also show that same ease and cheerfulness. They do not act as if travel outside the convent endangers their virtue. Their behavior should rather command respect and in turn be respectful of the sensitivities of the poor.²⁰ Neither did Catherine prize rigid schedules and prescriptions. Where these appear in the Presentation Rule Catherine omits them.

Other than the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and mental prayer the rule gives no prescribed prayer nor does it even detail the minimum amount of time for mental prayer. This is a marked change from the Presentation Rule which called for an hour and a quarter of mental prayer daily as well as other prayers recited in common, all in addition to the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Catherine values the flexibility needed

for ministry. Perhaps as a woman whose prayer life was formed before her novitiate, she found the prayers prescribed in the Presentation Rule an imposition. She did not impose her devotions on the Order.

Catherine had an inclusive sense regarding the works of the Institute. Although advised to perpetuate her work by founding a new Institute, Catherine did not seem to feel that this work was the property of religious alone. She notes that it is "the faithful" who are inspired to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor and emphasizes her solidarity with them by adding "us" to "poor Christians."

The spirituality she expresses and recommends is clearly and strongly focused on Jesus Christ, on his love and compassion for the poor, in devotion to his passion and to the Eucharist, and in her passion that others be brought into relationship with Christ.²¹

The spirit of Catherine's rule continues today to challenge the Sisters of Mercy.

It is his love and compassion for the sick and the poor that motivates her, his suffering and death that sustains her. The spirituality she expresses in the rule stems from a union with Christ such that the Sister of Mercy both ministers with Christ and finds him in those to whom she ministers. Her love for Christ underlies her ministry, and explains her concern for instructing the children, the distressed women, the sick and the dying in the practice of their religion.

In placing the chapters on the perfection of ordinary actions and the employment of time following those on the ministry Catherine relates integrally the aspects of action and contemplation in a manner proper to an apostolic institute. The sisters "perform their actions well when they keep themselves always in the Presence of God"²² and attend to the manner in which they work. The chapters, taken largely from the Presentation Rule, foster a faith-filled contemplative presence to the work at hand combined with a natural cheerful behavior that would "show a recollected mind."²³ This contemplative element in Catherine's spirituality is key in the life of an apostolic institute.

Her contemplative recognition of Christ and his gifts in others leaves her open and sensitive to the dignity of the poor she served as well as to the sisters who lived and ministered with her. This perception of the presence of Christ with the sisters in their journeys as they walked the streets and visited the poor enabled her with confidence to compose a rule that would enable the sisters to meet the needs of others outside the cloisters.

Her love for Christ in his humanity is expressed in

the rule through her respect and trust of human nature, in her vision of the blessing and happiness that could belong to others through their life in Christ. Her centeredness in Christ gave her a sensitivity to others expressed in the prescriptions for carrying out the works of mercy and in the descriptions of relations among the sisters and with their superiors.

Catherine wrote out of her experience of her own service of the poor, of the opening of the House on Baggot Street and of working and living with other women associated with her in the works of mercy, her insight into the spiritual and religious life gleaned from her reading and her contacts with spiritual guides among the Jesuits and Carmelites of Dublin and her novitiate at Georges Hill. The additions, deletions and reordering of the Presentation Rule are the result of her reflections on the life to which God had called her in the service of the poor and on her commitment to pursue that call in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, the new thing she perceived God was doing.

The spirit of Catherine's rule continues today to challenge the Sisters of Mercy. Her call to Mercy as the principal path whereby one follows Christ, her call to recognize the unity of humanity in Christ and therefore to respect the dignity of others whether those ministered to or companions in the institute find echoes in the 1991 Institute Direction Statement. It calls for Sisters of Mercy to commit themselves to act in solidarity with the economically poor, with women and children, with the multi-cultural reality of their own identity. To act as did Catherine members of the Institute must grow in that contemplative faith which Catherine brought to her living and then indeed they will be "animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor." This calls for "continual conversion in . . . lifestyle and ministries" and for the deeper continual conversion of heart that must precede all.²⁴

Footnotes

1. Cf. M. Raphael Consedine, P.B.V.M. *Listening Journey: A Study of the Spirit and Ideals of Nano Nagle and The Presentation Sisters*. (Victoria, Australia: Presentation Sisters), 1983, p. 114-116 on the revision of the Presentation Rule after the death of Nano Nagle and its final affirmation by Rome in 1805. It was this Rule that Catherine McAuley adapted for the Sisters of Mercy.

2. The relevant texts for this are: (1) *"In the Beginning" The Rule of the Sisters of Mercy Handwritten by the Foundress, Catherine McAuley, 1833*. Dublin, Ireland, Photostat copy, 1967. This photostat copy shows Catherine's text and the corrections made by Archbishop Daniel Murray. (2) *Rules and Constitutions of the Institute of the Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary, established in the city of Cork, for the Charitable Instruction of Poor Girls*, (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son. 1881.) This is the edition of the Presentation Rule that was approved in 1805.

(3) Mary C. Sullivan, RSM, editor. *A Critical Edition of The Original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy as written by Catherine McAuley (1778 - 1841) and corrected by Daniel Murray (1768 - 1852) and The Texts of Certain Prayers of Catherine McAuley*. Edited with Notes. Draft/selections. Unpublished version. 1989. The notes in this edition point out the changes made in the text of the Presentation Rule by Catherine as well as the emendations made by Archbishop Murray. This study will make reflection on Catherine's understanding of the Institute she founded more accessible.

3. Angela Bolster, RSM, *Positio Super Virtutibus: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of the Servant of God, Catherine McAuley, Founder of the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy, 1778 - 1841*. Vol. I. Rome: 1985, p. 211.

4. Presentation Rule, C. 2, a. 7, a. 8; Rule of the Sisters of Mercy, C. 2, a. 4.

5. C. 2, a. 5. Catherine opened the House of Mercy in 1827, two years prior to the lifting of the Penal Laws in Ireland. One of the purposes of these laws was to keep Irish Catholics uneducated. This section may be the closest Catherine approaches to what we would call today systemic change.

6. We have echoes here of the observation made in the Bermondsey Manuscript that ministry sends us to prayer and prayer to ministry. *Letter of Catherine McAuley*, ed. by Mary Ignatia Neumann, RSM, (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1969), p. 389.

7. C. 3, a. 1.

8. C. 3, a. 2.

9. Cf. Is. 26.

10. See a. 9, "They should pray . . . that God might look

with pity on His poor creatures and bring them to repentance.

11. A. 7 giving practical advice on reading, the tone of voice, etc.

12. A. 5 where she indicates the kind of shops "where the poor are generally known."

13. A. 8 on attending to the distress of the sick "since we are most disposed to receive advice and instruction from those who evince compassion for us."

14. C. 3, a. 7 and 8.

15. It is intriguing to ponder Catherine's earlier experiences at the death bed of those close to her and her own search as a young adult for an understanding and appreciation for her own religious identity with her evident deep concern for the repentance, instruction in the faith and confession of the dying.

16. C. 4, a. 1.

17. C. 4, a. 2.

18. Ibid.

19. C. 4, a. 3.

20. C. 3, a. 5. The sisters are advised in charity to curtail "looking about."

21. In Chapter 1, Article 2, Catherine explicitly recommends Jesus Christ to the sisters adding his name to the Presentation Rule reference to "their Divine Master." She then refers to Matthew 25, "he would consider as done to Himself whatever should be done to them."

22. C. 5, a. 5.

23. C. 6, a. 2.

24. Direction Statement from the 1st Chapter of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, August 1991.

Questions for Reflection

1. Sheila Carney raises a series of questions in the conclusion of her article. How would you respond to them?

2. Mary Sullivan chooses the words "animate" and "comfort" to research in Catherine McAuley's writings. How does Catherine's sense of "comfort" and "animate" alter, challenge, support your experience of ministering in Mercy?

3. How is transforming consciousness a part of your ministry of Mercy?

4. How can Catherine's appreciation of the Mystery of Christ aid in fostering an "animating" spirit of mercy?

5. Is there some particular word of Catherine which speaks to you now? How do you experience this?

6. In the founding of the Institute at Buffalo, there seemed to be an immediate response to "Catherine's passion for the poor." Are there other energy points of our tradition which we as community experience today? What are they?

7. In your experience of discernment for ministry, have you been inspired by any of our traditional texts? Which ones? What was this experience like?

Transforming Consciousness — A Work of Mercy

Marilyn King, RSM

A few years ago I received a collection of greeting cards on which were reproduced some of the calligraphies from our original Mercy documents. One of them, which I saved for a profession greeting, was a rather cramped copying of Isaiah 58:

*Is not this the fast that I choose;
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your home;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
Then shall your light break forth like the dawn . . .*
(vv. 6-8)

Certainly this text must have inspired our early Sisters with these works of mercy begin commissioned by the Lord Yahweh. These are the works of mercy which Catherine called "the business of our lives" in the Bermondsey Manuscript.

In reading further on in the text of Isaiah, however, I noticed that the Lord Yahweh speaks of a second kind of work that would be pleasing:

*If you turn back your foot from the sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride upon the heights
of the earth. (vv. 13-14)*

I wondered if the keeping of the sabbath was also a work of mercy — a kind of work of doing no work.

Certainly Jesus made a connection between the two kinds of works of mercy by choosing deliberately, it seems, to perform healings on the sabbath, not just to defy the laws of the holy day certainly, but to bring to full color the reason for the sabbath: to recognize through non-work the One who is the source of all human doing and to celebrate the fundamental right to be free from any bondage-labor. In other words, Jesus "worked" on the sabbath to set the record straight about who it is that works when we work.

Two recurring issues seem to crop up in the messages of many of the prophets which are reminiscent of these two ways of doing mercy: to live justly and to worship rightly. Both are aspects of the one covenant which was central to Jewish identity: treat one another as oneself because all are part of the family of the one God; and remember who is the Parent of the whole family. Woe to those who do not follow this law:

Hear this word, you . . . who oppress the poor

*and who crush the needy . . .
You shall be cast forth into Harmon, says
the Lord . . .
(You who) offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that
which is leavened (bread that involves extra
work) and proclaim freewill offerings . . .
You did not return to me, says the Lord.
Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel.
(Amos 4:1-12, passim)*

Furthermore, the Babylonian Exile served not only to purify the nation from its lapses in the exercise of justice and mercy towards one another, but also provided opportunity to retrieve all the sabbaths it had squandered with empty-hearted worship. Recall the word of God to Jeremiah: "God took into exile in Babylon those who escaped from the sword . . . to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths." (2 Ch. 36. 20f)

But, still I ask, how have we carried out the other request of God — the keeping of the sabbath, the work of non-work?

These musings on the prophetic texts led me to consider our whole tradition of works of mercy. Sharing bread with the hungry and sheltering the homeless poor and clothing those we see naked certainly have been part of our congregation's way of channeling God's mercy to God's people. Story upon story come to mind both from our foundation days in Ireland and from our own regional histories. We have responded to the expressed word about the sort of fast that pleases Yahweh, and we continue to do so.

But, still I ask, how have we carried out the other request of God — the keeping of the sabbath, the work of non-work? It doesn't seem to me that this has been as predominant and plainly a characteristic of us as a congregation. This, of course, is not to say that our activities for justice and our works of mercy have not come from a heart founded on God. We are but channels of the mercy of God which has been lavished on us. Catherine McAuley reminded us of the Center out of which we work in her memorable text:

*Now our center is God from Whom all our actions
should spring as from their source, and no exterior
action should separate us from Him.¹*

"But has our identity as an "apostolic congregation," our historical breakthrough as "the walking Sisters," our negative early experience of the Bermondsey experiment caused us to shy away from claiming sabbath-keeping as one of our characteristic works, as part of our charism?"

These kinds of questions led me further. Can the charism of a congregation change or does it just develop in time as variations on a theme? Can a call to also refrain from doing business be an invitation to Sisters of Mercy to help heal the fragmenting busyness and burn-out pace of today's culture? My exploration into this question about the nature of the Mercy charism and its possible development into new expressions which develop less familiar works of mercy led me to the reflection which follows.

Part I.

The Development of Charism

It took about a century for John Henry Newman's treatise, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, to enter the mainstream of theological discourse. Resistance to the notion that doctrine could develop came from theologians who held to the tenet that revelation was closed "with the death of the last apostle." How could statements of faith develop if all that was revealed by God was spoken perfectly in Jesus, the Word? Wouldn't development imply that something deeper or even different could be said about our creed? Even today there is occasional evidence of squeamish in the magisterium over proposals which are aimed at rethinking certain moral stands which rest their case on "unchanging natural law." There is reluctance to accept certain philosophical systems as proper vehicles to re-speak the "eternal truths" about the Trinity of the person of Christ or the sacraments or social justice. There is wariness of some Eastern forms of prayer which put human knowing into question and favor a "don't-know" mind as being closer to what really is than carefully honed and rationally systematic theological verities.

There certainly is just cause for these monitums. Still, a new openness toward the actual development of doctrine now exists in the Catholic church. Could this new insight be applicable also to the development of the charism of a religious congregation?

The Charism of a Religious Congregation

Is there any member of a religious congregation today who cannot quote from the passage of *Perfectae Caritatis* which gives the criteria for renewal: the gospel, the charism of the founder, and the signs of the times. Such light and energy were generated from these guidelines — renewed study of the Scriptures, enlightening investigation into the primary sources and surrounding influences of the founder's religious

congregation, and invigorating observation and research into present-day culture. Research, publications, workshops, chapters on these criteria resulted in the redesign of a whole way of life for thousands of religious. The gospel provided the fundamental inspiration to the renewal and the contemporary culture gave the context in which the renewal was to be lived out. The charism specified the particular way each congregation would live the gospel in today's world. For the purposes of this article, the charism factor in renewal of religious life will now be explored.

Charism and Charisms

One of those new understandings about our deposit of faith which has gained acceptance since Vatican II is that of Christ as the Ur-Sacrament. All our traditional seven sacraments can be understood properly only as they relate to Christ, the Sacrament of God. For example, the ordained priesthood is given its proper perspective in relation to the priesthood of the faithful whose priesthood, in turn, is rooted in the one priesthood of Christ. The symbols of all the sacraments are relative to the one fundamental visible expression of God in the incarnate Christ. Can we parallel this insight into the single base of all sacramentality with our understanding of the charism of a religious congregation by speaking of an Ur-charism in which all charisms are rooted and from which they develop and find appropriate expression?

The Original Charism

"Charism" is grace, gift. The fundamental gift to us is life with the revelation given us about life that it is the life-breath of God. At its root charism is a crystallization of the life of God in God's own creatures. Now, pre-eminent among God's children is Jesus, the Christ. In the teaching and the very person of Jesus is the clearest embodiment of the divine charism of life.

This gift of life in Jesus was to be handed on, being generative by nature. Like a crystal, Jesus caught the light of God's life and then reflected it to whatever turned toward it and received it. Thus, we are told, that the final action of Jesus' earthly life was to "hand over his spirit" (John 19:30). The rituals of his risen life include a breathing on his disciples in a gesture of the conferring of the Spirit (John 20:22). Jesus was the perfect vessel of the Ur-charism, the original gift of God's Spirit given at creation in promise and brought to maturity in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. This primary charism he delivered to all who would be there to catch its light.

Founding Charism

The history of Christianity is the story of the people who caught the Spirit of Jesus and reflected in the world a facet of his life. The human reflection of the Spirit of God has been greatly varied in brilliance, tone, configuration, and focus because the original

light energy, which is infinitely beyond even laser intensity, is the unfathomable, inexhaustible life of God.

Periodically, a gem in the human lineage is fashioned in such a way that it reflects in a particularly intense, original, attractive, and timely way the Original Gift. For us as Sisters of Mercy, Catherine was one of those gems. She embodied an aspect of God's life incarnated in Jesus which we identify as Mercy. Catherine reflected that facet of God in Jesus with such clarity and energy that others were drawn to her light and themselves caught and reflected it to others. This is the way our community was born and Catherine named its founder. This ability to catch the Spirit of Jesus and hand it on to others is her "founding charism."

Living Charism

Charism is generative by definition. Thus, the charism of a founder continues to live in the persons who gather around the founder, receive and, in turn, reflect his/her spirit. As the features of parents are found on the faces and in the mannerisms of their children, so that particular way that the Spirit of God is lived out in the founder can be detected in the living charism of the founder's family as it continues on from generation to generation.

From time to time the family comes together for a reunion and the members of the clan remember the stories of their parents and grandparents as far back as the communal memory can go. The spirit of the family is traced often by some enterprising member and a tree is drawn and photos are gathered and resemblances are rediscovered. The genes of the ancestors are passed on from one generation to the next in a wonderful array of variations on a theme.

However, it sometimes happens that some member of the family doesn't look like anyone or has behaved in such a way that the inevitable question arises, "Where did he come from?" or "Where did she ever learn to act that way?" The living charism includes from time to time the new, the surprising, the puzzling as the original and revered characteristics of the family seem to take a turn.

Similarly, the charism of a religious congregation resides in a privileged way in the life of the founder. But is also is carried on by the members of the family generated by the founder, with all the variations of the founder's charism. Some of these variations are so minor they almost seem to be imitations. Some are more creative, either because of the cut of the gem reflecting the light or the atmosphere in which the light is refracted and received by others. And some are so unusual that the question arises: "Does this one belong to our family?"

Evolving Charism

"How far can I bend before I break?" is the ques-

tion asked by the family patriarch in *Fiddler on the Roof* when his children tested the limits of his family's tradition. "On the one hand," he reflected, there is the fact that these were his children, continuations of his life, and so what they did was part of him carried on in time — no matter how far removed their behavior seemed to be from the accepted way of doing things. But "on the other hand," they challenged the boundaries of his religious identity, as though a new gene had been introduced into the family blood line. Should they be disowned even for health reasons? Such was his dilemma.

In religious congregations similar questions arise. How far can we adapt before we are unfaithful to our charism? Can we Sisters of Mercy go beyond "the peculiar characteristic of the congregation: that is, the most assiduous application to the education of poor girls, the visitation of the sick, and the protection of poor women of good character" to devote ourselves to educating the middle class, assume executive positions in large health facilities, direct retreats for unchurched seekers? The answer has for the most part been a resounding "Yes, of course." The founding charism continues in the living charism with many new variations.

**... there can be a new moment
which nudges a
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an evolution of
the founding charism.**

But a question remains. Is there a boundary even to adaptation of the founding charism? Can a member or a movement within a congregation introduce some version the original charism which, as it were, does not pass through the crystal of the founding charism and is, therefore, truly a new founding charism? The case of Mother Teresa of Calcutta is one example of this eventuality. She felt that what God gave her was a gift for others that was different from the charism of her original congregation. And so she left that community behind and began something new.

Still, can there emerge in a congregation a new expression of the founding charism which really does go beyond the intention or imagination of the founder and still be in continuity with the founding charism? I believe so, just as there can be development in the doctrine of our Catholic faith. Sometimes a member of a congregation may be made in such a way that the reflected light of the founder's charism is absorbed on a radically new level of consciousness. Sometimes the atmosphere of the times is so diffusive that the light of

the founder is mostly scattered and lost upon the environs and for the founding light to be transmitted a new medium must be tried. I would call this variety of charism — which is linked to that of the founding charism but is also new — an "evolving charism."

Could it not be that our attempts to revision Mercy or re-image religious life are responses to the emergence of this particular charism? As the original charism of Jesus' Spirit remains the source of all charisms in the church, the founding charism continues to be the inspiration for a congregation. But there can be a new moment which nudges a congregation forward toward an evolution of the founding charism.

In our own Mercy community some of these new configurations are seen in those who have been drawn to respond to one of the world's great cries, the cry of Mother Earth. These members of the congregation feel called to live out their vocation to Mercy by engaging in a new focus of life, one which lives out the consequences of a choice to respect the material resources of creation. There are those who have been given the gift of artistic expression and believe that their art is an avenue of Mercy which touches and heals the human spirit. There are those who are called to a life of non-violence. Their work of mercy is to be non-violent and, as much as possible, to affect their spheres of influence with that same spirit.

Certainly, these three examples of doing mercy are traceable to Catherine McAuley's dedication to respond to those in need. But there is a new dimension to these works of mercy and it is hard to imagine that Catherine would have thought to include ecological living, artistic expression and a commitment to non-violence in her listing of the "peculiar characteristics of the congregation."

Three Arenas for Doing Mercy

Catherine's arena for doing mercy was primarily wherever she saw unmet needs of those who called forth in her the spiritual and corporal works of mercy: the homeless, the hungry, the sick and dying, the unprotected, the uneducated. She also delved into what I describe as a second arena of doing mercy, one which has come into focus in more recent years both in the congregation and in the church as a whole. This is the arena of systems and structures which permit and cause homelessness, hunger, unnecessary sickness, and the like. Those who address the causes of poverty and injustice in attempting to change the system which is the perpetrator involve themselves in politics and social reform in order to relieve the suffering of so many people caught in the unjust structures.

There is a third arena of doing mercy, one which, while not a replacement or substitute for the other two, is a ground for each. This is an arena which, to use the gem analogy, goes to the atomic level of the stone's structure. It addresses the question of why the systems of society are unjust. How is it that unjust systems

come into being and continue to wreak such suffering on the world and society? It is the arena of how reality is perceived, the arena of awareness or consciousness. This arena is akin to the second kind of fasting Yahweh calls for. It involves the work of sabbath-keeping, the work of contemplative awareness.

Part II. Transformation of Consciousness as a Work of Mercy

Now when they hear this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:37f)

The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe. (Albert Einstein)

This commitment will impel us to . . . call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries. (Institute Direction Statement)

The first century of the Christian era and our own century are each marked by a sense of urgency and an accompanying call for conversion, as signaled by the above quotations. For the Jews it was to recognize Jesus as Christ and Lord and to take on a life of loving as he had loved. For us in the twentieth century and as a new Institute it may be less clear what to change to, though it is equally imperative a call as that issues by Peter. Change our ways of thinking or die. That is the way Einstein's admonition sounds to us, doesn't it? Change our hearts so we may live. That is the way our Direction Statement sounds, doesn't it?

The New Age

As we approach the year 2000 the voices of the "Age of Aquarius," regarded a decade or so ago as "fringy," are being taken much more seriously. We read and hear about the New Age, the Third Wave, the 4th Dimension, the third millenium, the paradigm shift. Some of these terms are found in pop magazines or sub-culture videos, some in straight news reporting, and some in scholarly books and essays. Wherever they arise, more and more we are sensing that something new is definitely on the horizon and it needs to be taken seriously.

One compelling analysis of the movement towards the new age is in a rather unknown work by the German philosopher, Jean Gebser (1905-1973).³ His description of the stages of human consciousness is, I believe, enlightening and pertinent to this discussion of the evolution of the Mercy charism in the arena of consciousness transformation. For this reason a skeletal overview of Gebser's thought now follows.

The Stages of Human Consciousness

According to Gebser, the human race has passed through four stages of consciousness and is on the brink of a fifth. They are the archaic, the magical, the mythical, the mental, and the yet-to-be-named. In each stage time, space, ego, and relation of the self to the universe are regarded uniquely. For example, in the archaic stage, the human person, just emerged from purely animal consciousness, has a pervading sense of oneness with the world outside the individual self. The archaic consciousness is without a sense of time, space, or individual ego much like the animal is, but without being guided solely by instinct; there is an awareness of a certain inner freedom which is essential to humanity.

Most of the illnesses of our age ... come ironically from a perceived lack of time which we name "stress."

The second stage of consciousness, the magical, emerged when the human person took another step, the realization that s/he, though still at one with nature, was a part of a whole — somewhat as a child views his/her existence. In this stage there is wonder at the powers of nature which can be entered into for benefit or harm. There is recognition that there is something other than oneself, greater than oneself, though the ego is still so undeveloped that it is more accurate to say there still is no sense of the individual "I." Space is perceived in a two-dimensional fashion, as reflected in the art of this era. Time is not measured quantitatively yet, but qualitatively, in cycles of day and night, spring and winter, new moon and old moon. But there still is no sense of past, present, future — no historical sense.

Psychic life emerges in the third stage, simultaneously with the recognition of the "ego of the soul" and the "other" as distinct from the ego. At this mythical stage religion, the act of relating to a higher power (whether it be simply a numinous energy or a superperson), is possible because something distinct outside the self can be imagined. Hence, the formulation of myths come with this stage; they are a vehicle of projection of the inner self to a greater world. Time is still devoid of our modern sense of past, present, and future in this stage, and space is still experienced as flat. The human person senses that s/he is circumscribed by space from which s/he cannot be freed by his/her own power.

The stage of consciousness which predominates today is characterized as "mental" or "rational." It

attained full flower in the so-called Age of Enlightenment, signaled by Descartes' "*cogito, ergo sum.*" With the firm establishment of the ego as a thinking entity and the referent for all other reality, the human person was able to regard all that which is "non-I" as separate from the "I." Unlike the undifferentiated consciousness of the archaic self, the rational consciousness perceives the universe as separate and measurable and divisible and categorizable. At this stage time became clock time which measures and divides into past, present, and future. Three dimensions enter into the world of art, giving the viewer a sense of the "out there."

In our society today, voices are lamenting that an over-emphasis on rational consciousness has brought about the death knell of this stage.⁴ We are today in a decadent phase in which the achievements of rational consciousness are showing their shadow side, to the point of the possibility of total destruction of the planet. Conceptual time which has been so beneficial in helping us record history and develop the sciences of physics and astronomy, to cite a few examples, has become "the enemy." Most of the illnesses of our age, which is renown for its advances over communicable diseases and the marvels of microsurgery, come ironically from a perceived lack of time which we name "stress." Our ability to distinguish and objectify, which has brought so many new insights into the make-up of both our material and our psychological worlds, has brought us to a point of being threatened by breakdown. The authors of *Habits of the Heart*⁵ call this situation a result of our American "culture of separation," which affects every aspect of our lives and society, from TV programming to specialization and departmentalization in our universities.

And thus, for better or for worse, we are at the end of one era and on the brink of something new in the evolution of consciousness. We are facing a fifth stage which, while not negating the preceding stages, relativizes their positions in the history of development in human consciousness. The leading characteristic of this stage is integration. It is a spiritual stage. In this new consciousness space moves into a fourth dimension, called also "non-mension," an integration of the three dimensions which our mental consciousness thought was all that was there. Artists like Picasso and scientists like Einstein were prophets of this non-mension. In the fifth stage the human person will be "time-free," free from time because of an over-riding awareness of the fullness of the present moment. This is the mystical stage in which the ego is at one with all that is, as in the archaic stage, but with the important difference that it is acutely conscious that it is, so acutely that the ego can be said to disappear into pure consciousness.

If it is true that "what has failed at every level — from the society of nations to the national society to the local community to the family — is integration"⁶

and if it is true that this failure has brought human society to a crisis which threatens catastrophic destruction, then what is needed now and is an urgent cry is not a new system of some sort which is born from our rational approach to things, but a new way of thinking.

The Call to Transformation of Consciousness

St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (12:2). And in Philippians: "In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus" (2:5). In Christian terms, then, it can be argued that the fifth stage of human consciousness comes in Baptism when in Christ a person is no longer just him/herself, but is in Christ Jesus. Baptism makes us a part of God, and as such, part of all that is. Thus, the integration which is the hallmark of the new consciousness is achieved through this new life in Christ. In Christ a person goes beyond the limitations of time and space and lives connected with all creation at the deepest center of being.

Shifting to a New Consciousness

What is new, then, in the call to the new consciousness on this brink of the third millennium? Whereas this way of viewing reality is the result of Christian conversion and the expressed experience of mystics, it must be admitted that it hasn't been the over-riding pattern of consciousness which shapes how the human race as a whole views the world today. I believe the newness lies in a call to the whole of humanity to transform its way of thinking, an evolution as radical as the shifts from the archaic to the magical to the mythical to the mental.

In our Western society today we seem to assume that each being is not a part of a whole, but apart from all else. This frame of reference, or paradigm, has been called, among other things, Cartesian consciousness. This mindset places each individual ego at the center of the world and positions all else as object out there. This kind of seeing opens the door to the regard of all reality outside of the individual self as fair game for manipulative positioning in the orbit around the center-self. How else, when this consciousness degenerates to its worse, is it possible to wage war on others, pollute the earth, tolerate hunger and homelessness in the world, engage in cut-throat competition, murder priests and their housekeepers, or just play avoidance games with the person next door? Only if the "other" is not me, is not my self would this be conceivable. This way of thinking, I believe, is at the root of the crises confronting us today.

This dark side of mental consciousness has enmeshed us in structural sin in businesses, multinational enterprises, national policies, and the like. Structural sin is simply the conglomerate of sinful, I-centered conduct. If this is so, the path to overcome structural sin begins with the conversion of the indi-

vidual, getting to the root of the craving for profit and power and dominion over goods and other persons. Systemic change, therefore, is futile without conversion of heart, without changing our pattern of seeing, without a transformation of consciousness. Surely, this is the insight of the members of the First Institute Chapter as proclaimed in the call to continual conversion in our Direction Statement.

A decision to give oneself to the kind of awareness in which the self is perceived as part of a whole, united with all being in the One Being, is a key to sustainable and just systemic reformation. Just as we are all personally affected by injustices and violations of human rights wherever they occur, so too, an effort to live in harmony with the immediate environment of our self, our neighbor and nature will restore a wholeness to our world. The enormity of the task of systemic transformation can be matched by the power of each converted heart. If the old paradigm is threatening to kill us, perhaps a change of mind from exclusively mental consciousness to one which frames reality in a new integrating way will bring us forward into the next millenium and enable us to live in the knowledge that "each is in all and all is in each" (Plotinus).

. . . nothing terrorizes us so much as a call to change our way of thinking.

Admittedly, nothing terrorizes us so much as a call to change our way of thinking. The researchers of *Habits of the Heart*, for example, summarizing their analysis of the American scene and the paralysis detected in American society in the face of moving into a new future, described this fear in this way:

What we fear above all, and what keeps the new world powerless to be born, is that if we give up our dream of private success for a more genuinely integrated societal community, we will be abandoning our separation and individuation, collapsing into dependence and tyranny.⁷

And yet, according to these same authors, the way out (or the way forward) is integration, transformation of consciousness in this direction:

What we find hard to see is that it is the extreme fragmentation of the modern world that really threatens our individuation; that what is best in our separation and individuation, our sense of dignity and autonomy as persons, requires a new integration if it is to be sustained.

The notion of a transition to a new level of social integration, a newly vital social ecology, may also be resisted as absurdly utopian, as a project to create a perfect society. But the transformation of

*which we speak is both necessary and modest. Without it, indeed, there may be very little future to think about at all.*⁸

But the future is not all gloomy. Today there are evidences that a major change of consciousness is occurring. Perhaps the cataclysmic threat we are facing from nuclear weapons and environmental catastrophe is the very pressure we need to shift an accepted paradigm and to alter our consciousness so that it functions on a whole new level. By recognizing the deep connectedness of all beings, by acknowledging that there is a common source for the life in all of us and in all that is, we have sure hope of survival. Developing this consciousness promises continued life. As our assumptions change, our values will change, our behavior will change and our society will change. As the paradigm shifts and the mystical becomes the rule rather than the exception, we will find a way to live in peace together, in harmony with and with respect towards natural creation, using gratefully only what we need for our sustenance and seeing the glory of God in that person next door.

Doing Mercy in the New Age

If ever there were a time for the charism of a community to evolve it is now. At this time of major transition survival questions have arisen. Can we continue to exist? What needs to die so that something new can be born in us? In what ways can we as a group of women committed to the transcendent and as professed "specialists" in a merciful response to the needs of the world, find new expressions of our life as we move into the fifth stage of human consciousness? A few sketches of what Mercy may look like in the new age follow.

Priority of Contemplation

It is nearly obvious that in a life characterized by mystical consciousness time and space would be devoted to contemplation. The new consciousness does not just happen, particularly at the early stages when it struggles to wrest itself from the old way of thinking. Although conversion is pure gift, it does need to be cultivated, supported, and willed.

It is this feature of the priority of contemplation which might challenge most directly a congregation founded to do works of mercy. We Sisters of Mercy are known for our active ministry. We are not a group of contemplative nuns! But suppose it is true that the future survival of the world hinges on a new way of thinking characterized as mystical and that the root of human suffering today, suffering which mercy seeks to alleviate, is faulty consciousness. Then is it not radically consistent with our founding charism to foster a way of life which holds contemplation as a priority?

What would this mean on a practical level? We might take a cue from the original horarium of the Sisters of Mercy in which about four and a half hours

daily were spent in "religious exercises." Could it be that in our earliest rhythm of life there was a balance between work and attention to the spiritual dimension of life just in the allotment of time? Admittedly, this kind of counting hours and separation of work and prayer into categories can imply a false dichotomy and, in fact, is evidence of a rational consciousness at work! Nonetheless, the fact remains that a significant portion of the day was given over to prayer during the founding period of our congregation.

Whether or not a schedule change guarantees a better balance between work and prayer, I would imagine a contemplative style of Mercy life in the new age would allow more time for "just being" and "non-doing" than the widely accepted American standard of a 40+ hour week work schedule permits. Simply put, the nurturing of contemplative awareness call for more sabbath time.

"We are not what we do" is a truism heard these days.

This shift in schedule necessarily pares down our work time. And this, in turn, challenges the work ethic we say so often is killing not only our bodies, but also our true self-awareness. "We are not what we do" is a truism heard these days. There is nothing as effective in driving home that truth than choosing to actually do less. Those who have been forced to work less because of sickness can tell us how strong is the link our culture makes between who we are and how much we are worth, and what we do and how much we accomplish. This illusion of our age is unmasked in sabbath rest.

One of the marks of contemplative awareness is an experiential knowledge of the unity of all God's creation in God. This sense of solidarity which comes in contemplation directly touches into the original charism of the Sisters of Mercy: "The blessing of unity still dwells amongst us This is the spirit of the Order." A contemplative consciousness cultivates an awareness of the interdependence of all individuals and nations. This experience of solidarity reverses the destructive forces which lead to structural sin and creates a path to peace. Such a work of mercy, this contemplative living!

Simple Living

As mentioned above, a life with a priority given to contemplation has a consequence the reduction of work time. This, in turn, automatically places one in a lower income bracket; and this, in a more positive light, is an invitation to live in material simplicity. Actually, the two contemplation and simple living go hand in hand. It is the common experience of the contemplative to realize that "to have" is secondary to "to

be." Further, some ways of having even prevent one from deeply and joyfully living.

Simple living is more than just a consequence of a choice to put job in a secondary place in one's life. It is in itself a work of mercy. Is it not true that the standard of living of the First World is one of the chief causes of the sub-standard living of the rest of the world? Doesn't that mean, then, that a way of life which chooses to live with less is one in which the Quaker axiom is realized: "Live simply so others may simply live."

Furthermore, as solidarity is the path to peace, then being in some material need is a very real way of helping the needy. Traditionally we Sisters of Mercy have been the providers for the needy. This arena of engaging in direct ministry through the works of mercy is laudable, certainly needed, and biblically inspired. But perhaps living on the other end of the giving dyad may also be a work of mercy.

Another face of material simplicity is living with practical respect for the goods of the earth.

Another face of material simplicity is living with practical respect for the goods of the earth. Doing without, using only what is needed, recycling all the ways we know about which will help save our planet and save us in the process are also invitations to do mercy correlative to living contemplatively. More than ever we are called to be merciful to Mother Earth, to let the land rest and regenerate according to the laws of nature.

Ministry in a New Light

Our Original Rule spoke of our engagement in the duties of Martha and Mary in such a way that the one would help and not hinder the other. We are an active community devoted to the Lord and so ministry is part of our founding charism, so central to it that it should be a continued feature in a refounding expression of our charism. But there may be some new approaches to our work in the new age beyond just reducing the amount of time devoted to work.

As St. James reminds us, working and eating go together. In order to "be" we need to be nourished and in order to have food we need to work for it. But working is also a very real way that we can identify with most people who are in the ordinary working class. Having a regular job has a way of keeping our feet in the real world. Work goes hand in hand with a contemplative awareness as does simple living. The

Spirit of God, which is our consciousness, is creative, giving, loving. Union with that Spirit urges us to similarly bring about new life, heal, reconcile, enlighten wherever there is dying, suffering, division, darkness. Thus the living charism of mercy particularizes the Ur-charism of Life. Yet our work as Sisters of Mercy is so much more than breadwinning and being with the working class or even communicating the Spirit of God to others.

One of the punishments of the original sin related in the early chapters of Genesis was that work would become distasteful and onerous. A new creation, then, gives promise of a transformed meaning of work. Our American philosophy of work is based on a system which rewards ambition and plays on our fears of losing. This system of rewards and punishments is a contemporary enfleshment of the Genesis curse. It fits right in with the fourth stage of consciousness. With a mystical consciousness, however, the system simply is ineffective, for gaining and losing have no meaning in this stage. If then, the fifth stage of consciousness assumes a dominant position, the meaning of work will be transformed in the process. To quote *Habits of the Heart* again:

Reducing the inordinate rewards of ambition and our inordinate fears of ending up as losers would offer the possibility of a great change in the meaning of work in our society and all that would go with such a change. To make a real difference, such a shift in rewards would have to be a part of a reappropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, a return in a new way to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one's own advancement.⁹

Just by working with a transformed consciousness we could bring to the world of work a whole new spirit of joy and meaning and generativity.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of what Mercy might look like when it engages in the work of transforming consciousness. Certainly other areas in our life would be affected by a conversion to this new consciousness — the focus and style of our personal and communal prayer, the quality of our community life, the transparency of our interpersonal relationships, the clarity of our communications, the configuration of our governance structures.

This conversion is not something which is to come in the future, but it is in process among us right now. Still, I believe, it is coming now to a clearer focus and greater intensity than in the past.

In Advent of 1991 our Institute Leadership team wrote to us about this invitation to a transfiguring vision we have all received by our birth and by our baptism:

Perhaps this is what Christmas is about: a gift-invitation to each of us to "cross over" from our

accustomed ways of seeing into the new and different perspective of that little child who came to us poor, unguarded and full of hope.

Our prayerful wish for each of you is that the hope that Jesus brought may fill your heart with joy, peace and love, and your mind with clarity of vision for the future.

I join my prayer with theirs.

Footnotes

1. *Retreat Instructions*, p. 154.

2. The term "founder" is being used in this article as a gender inclusive word.

3. His thought is summarized and commented on by Hugo Enomiya-Lasalle in *Living in the New Consciousness* (Boston: Shambala, 1989).

4. Apparently, in Eastern cultures the mental stage, developed in India a thousand years before its appearance in the West with Plato's world of ideas, did not decline into over-rationalism as it has in the West. This is the opinion of Begser.

5. Robert Bellah, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

6. Bellah, p. 285.

7. Bellah, p. 286.

8. Ibid.

9. Bellah, pp. 287-88.

Contributors

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Anne McLay, RSM, is from Brisbane, Australia. She has a Ph.D. in History. Her published writings cover aspects of Australian history, Mercy history and Constitutions, and feminism.

Book Review:

Where Can We Find Her?

Searching for Women's Identity in the New Church

Edited by Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM • Reviewed by Prudence M. Croke, RSM

Within the covers of this book we can find her: the accomplished feminist scholar and theologian, lay and religious, and the women for whom they speak. These authors include among them seven Sisters of Mercy. Their theological reflection on women's concerns emerges from a variety of disciplines: scripture, philosophy, ethics, sociology, education, history, spirituality, literature, and linguistics.

Authors in Part I search for women's identity in scripture; in Part II, for women's identity in society; in Part III, for women's identity in the church. Editor Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt in Part IV suggests several formats for a series of group discussions on each of the chapters. For each essay she includes insightful discussion questions which point to future directions and possibilities.

Women in Scripture

Scripture scholar Dianne Bergant, CSA, in the lead essay fashions a new biblical anthropology. From an exegesis of the creation narratives in Genesis she explores the themes of human dignity in virtue of image/likeness, the equality of the man and woman, their responsibility as stewards, and their relationship as partners. For Bergant reflection on the biblical texts in the light of experience demands that we strive to achieve collaboration, cooperation, compassion, justice, and mutuality.

In an analysis of the New Testament story of the hemorrhaging woman (Mk. 5:24-34; Mt. 9:20-22; Lk. 8:43-48), Karen A. Barta unveils the healing power of feminine initiative and the crippling effects of paternalism. She contrasts Jesus' treatment of women as persons and hearers of the word with the devastation wreaked upon women by a patriarchal church structure and various church documents.

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM, biblicist and leader in feminist spirituality, challenges a sexist interpretation of scripture in her essay, "Agent or Icon . . ." She formulates a theological anthropology of women which embraces the whole life span. With concern for women's nature, vocation and mission, Rosenblatt emphasizes women's discipleship with Jesus and leadership in the community of faith over the Eve-Mary-Bride triad of images. The expansive embrace of this chapter empowers all women who follow Christ to act as agents of their own destiny in the church.

Women in Society

In the second section Barbara Moran, RSM,

applies the rhetorical and literary category of "voice" to church documents, specifically to the bishops' pastoral on women. In her essay "Let the Women Speak" she questions who is speaking, to whom, why, and how. She exposes the process and style of the pastoral as defective. To effect a change of heart in the entire church, Moran recommends collaborative learning and the inclusion of women's reflection in the process. The "voice" in a pastoral on women should speak of women's images and experience of God, their prayer and spirituality, and their concerns, contends Moran. True partnership in the mystery of redemption will then model the desired transformation in church and society.

. . . women conceptualize the moral life and resolve moral dilemmas differently than men.

Elizabeth McMillen, RSM, asserts that women's "Voices Speak Out of Fertile Silence." From deep within, women conceptualize the moral life and resolve moral dilemmas differently from men. Women speak from personal experience; they resonate with family and society and struggle for the good of other women besides themselves. Women consider not only moral norms but also motivations, limitations, and possibilities. McMillan critiques church leaders for not moving closer to alienated voices. She challenges leaders to include women scholars, especially philosophers and theologians, in the moral development of church teaching.

Historical theologian Dolores L. Greeley, RSM, exposes the moral evil of patriarchy as it exists throughout the world and in the church. Patriarchy as a social system is a power structure in which men control ownership, decision-making and principles of interpretation. From experience garnered in educational travels, Greeley in "Patriarchy: A Global Reality" describes the plight and struggle of women in Pakistan, India, Africa, and Southeast Asia. She considers the education of women throughout the world as critical to the formation of a just world society. For full liberation in church and society the work of consciousness raising must continue.

Focusing on more spiritual needs, Marilyn J.

Gustin urges the development of the interior, mystical qualities of women and men. The person docile to the Holy Spirit Gustin calls "The Receptive Partner," one who is cooperative and courageous in response. She offers the heart and the cup as symbols of receptivity. The heart becomes the abode of the divine presence which vivifies the whole person. Similarly, the cup receives liquid, which later overflows to one who drinks. In receiving and overflowing, heart and cup symbolize feminine and masculine qualities, both of which are needed to prevent distortion in church and society.

Women in the Church

In a penetrating essay in Part III Maryanne Stevens, RSM, queries, "How Shall Our Church Teach?" She commends the bishops for consulting the laity before writing their pastorals on militarism, capitalism, and sexism. With Paulo Freire's theory of education as her model, Stevens demonstrates the successes and failures of the first draft of "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption." The inclusion of women's voices offers a positive element. The bishops' predilection for references to the bible and tradition, both fraught with the sexism of a patriarchal history, contributed to the failure of the first draft. Stevens advocates Freire's model of education which replaces the "banking" method of education with one which develops critical and creative thinkers and leads peoples to liberation for the sake of the kingdom. She recommends the bishops incorporate maternal, life-giving qualities in their teaching.

With a view toward greater mutuality and shared power among men and women in the Catholic church, Janet Ruffing, RSM, recalls the progress already achieved. In "Recovering a History of Partnership: American Sisters in the Nineteenth Century" Ruffing delineates various types and degrees of shared respon-

sibility and interdependence as congregations of sisters opened and operated institutions of education, health care, and social service. Women religious assumed leadership and pioneer roles in the development of the American Catholic church. Ruffing believes the shared life of grace in Christianity suggests the contemporary need for a transformation of structures and attitudes which support the current rhetoric of partnership.

In an excellent article on "Women Deaconesses: Historical and Contemporary Explorations," Ann Marie Caron, RSM, uncovers the liturgical and non-liturgical functions, the ordained and unordained status that women deacons experienced in the history of the church. While the American bishops recommend a study of the "installation" of women deacons, Caron asserts that contemporary pastoral needs justify the "ordination" of women to the diaconate. In the spirit of Vatican II which based ecclesial ministry in baptism, Caron advocates the ordination to the priesthood of women and men, married and single. The Spirit who inspired the twelve apostles to create the diaconate might be breathing in this direction.

This collection of essays deserves wide readership among the Mercy community and others interested in a just society. Each well researched and well written chapter provides the background for an honest appraisal of women's position today. Each charts the course for a future more faithful to the mind of Christ and his treatment of women. Extended bibliographies from leading feminist writers provide helpful suggestions for further reading. The book would make an excellent gift for a friend or for a group to share.

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Where Can We Find Her? Searching for Women's Identity in the New Church. Edited by Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM. New York: Paulist, 1991. Pp. iv + 166. \$12.95.

Book Review:

Sisters of Mercy Spirituality in America 1843-1900

By Kathleen Healy, RSM • Reviewed by Anne McLay, RSM

Reading some of the multitudinous entries in Kathleen Healy's collection from nineteenth century Mercy documents, I was truly moved by the words of these 'valiant women.' They wrote as they criss-crossed America — to give service wherever they were needed, ordinary sisters and outstanding foundresses, nineteenth century martyrs labouring under extreme difficulties — many times, unto death. In the midst of all their activity, they had left evidence of a deeply meaningful and often extraordinarily beautiful inner life; of a life lived together with much human warmth, community, and friendship.

I had begun to peruse the book in my own three months' long American Mercy Odyssey, including the MAST meeting in Pittsburgh which had focussed on Catherine McAuley. I had just ended a long period of research into Mercy history in Western Australia, and was about to begin another in South Australia. My feet were now following the steps of some of these Mercy women in North and South America. The question of Mercy spirituality had become uppermost in my mind.

Is there a Mercy spirituality? Kathleen Healy contends that her sources clearly reveal that a Mercy spirituality is identifiable. The poem "The Sister of Mercy" which she had made her frontispiece is chosen well. Devotion to the person of Jesus and his passion; the empty ebony cross symbolizing the Sister of Mercy's own identification with Jesus in his suffering; the recognition that her cloister is 'the alley of the poor'; the light of her purity and the mysticism of her compassionate love; her witnessing to Mercy as an essential quality of God: these are characteristics of nineteenth century Mercy life and ethos wherever encountered.

Kathleen Healy's collection fills out these characteristics of Mercy spirituality and adds others:

- a conviction that human development is fundamental to religious growth — as evidenced in the care taken to find the work most fitted to the capabilities and needs of each Sister; in the strong streak of practicality (both Orestes Brownson and a prisoner at Sing Sing commented on this); in the great love of teaching;
- a trust in Divine Providence — seen in their confidence in each other's gifts, even the very young; in their gratitude for what was received;
- a devotion to Mary and to the Blessed Sacrament (Sister Collette O'Connor of Baltimore, in charge of a Military Hospital during the Civil War, always prayed for a few moments before the Blessed Sacrament before making a serious decision);

- a conviction that Mercy has no limits — in type of work, in devotedness to task, in openness to all of any race or creed;
- a very simple and human quality, shown in their joyfulness, their 'good-cheer' and 'innocent mirth', their sensitivity to others even in little things; the 'holy and tender friendship for those united by spiritual kinship.'

One might protest that such an anthology would be composed to illustrate certain predetermined characteristics of Mercy spirituality. But Kathleen Healy's research has been too exhaustive in scope for that. The types of source materials are varied and intimate; the number of extracts large; their distribution geographically wide; their historical ambit fascinating and diverse. The anthology provides a good object lesson concerning primary sources to the aspiring historian; a valuable resource for the student of spirituality; a heart-warming and challenging set of Mercy documents for any person following the way of compassion.

The editor's fundamental premise is that spirituality is based on and revealed by lived experience and reflection on that experience. This volume in the series 'Sources of American Spirituality' amply illustrates lived Mercy experience. Kathleen Healy's running commentary provides some pointers for our reflection.

If I have any criticism, it is that there are no indications of what today's student, especially those coming from the standpoint of feminist or of creation spirituality, might judge as negative characteristics of late nineteenth century Mercy spirituality (denial of world, perfectionism, masculinity, and so on). Perhaps the hardening into such negative traits belongs to a later historical period.

* * * * *

Sisters of Mercy Spirituality in America 1843-1900
Kathleen Healy, RSM (ed). Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ
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