

The **MAST** *Journal*

The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology
VOL. 4, NO. 1 **FALL 1993**

Mercy Spirituality

Cottage Controversy: Unlocking the Mystery — p. 1

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

Quaker Influences Upon Catherine McAuley — p. 5

Rita Valade, R.S.M.

Echoes of Celtic Christianity in Catherine McAuley — p. 9

Julia Upton, R.S.M.

The Mystery of God in Celtic Consciousness — p.14

Moirra Hunt

Confidence in God — p. 21

Ann Marie Caron, R.S.M.

Catherine McAuley and the Grace of "Unable" — p. 27

Marianne Heib, R.S.M.

Dear Sisters and Friends,

This editorial notice in the form of a letter respects the genre in which Catherine McAuley most typically communicated. Her words were not directed to a wide audience of learned and anonymous readers, but to a community of friends. There is no collection of Catherine's scholarly articles, and her letters would never be called theological treatises. In the lives of some charismatic persons one notes a certain irony in relation to literary output. The force of their personality manifests itself more in the mission they generated than the text they produced. Jesus left his words to be recorded and interpreted by others, and Paul's scant authentic corpus hardly accounts in itself for the tide of evangelization that swept across the mediterranean in the first century.

It is against this paradox that Katherine Doyle pioneers the investigation of a catechetical and apologetic set of conversations attributed to Catherine, *Cottage Controversy*. Why have we apparently bypassed this theological work and paid so little attention to its re-editions? The answering involves a process of remembering the history of the Institute from a new perspective. That is the project of sustaining any communal spirituality: it must be retrieved, re-interpreted, and re-contextualized if it is to be lived. Rita Valade outlines those principles of Quaker spirituality and religious practice which seem to have resonance with Catherine's style of governance, her fostering of community connections, her relation to ecclesial authority, and her acceptance of religious pluralism.

Julia Upton proposes a loving and appreciative listening for echoes of Celtic, pre-Christian spiritual values in the life and work of Catherine, such as silence, love for the earth, and the precious routine of daily life. Her essay is complemented by a retrieval of Celtic Christianity's robust and graphic understanding of God. The Irish laywoman Moira Hunt argues that a Romanizing of the Irish church after the eighth century a.d. submerged these earth-centered, often feminized features of an earlier indigenous Christian spirituality. Ann Marie Caron highlights the Foundress' trust in providence which inspired her to make new foundations in spite of many risks, and to console others in the midst of grief and reversal. Marianne Heib offers less an analysis and more a meditation on a less well-known aspect of Catherine. This is the "grace of unable," the yielding side of her spirituality, which showed itself when pressures were too great for her to bear and when she confronted the imminence of her own death.

Our project in this volume of MAST Journal is to gather the themes of spiritual continuity which are proving life-restoring, healing and sustaining. Those committed to the future of Mercy give voice to a spirituality which has, in the song text of Suzanne Toolan, RSM, both "roots and wings."

With good hope,

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

THE MAST JOURNAL is published three times a year (November, March and July) by the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology. Members of the Editorial Board are Srs. Maryanne Stevens (Omaha), Janet Ruffing (Burlingame), Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt (Burlingame), and Julia Upton (Brooklyn). Subscription correspondence with Julia Upton, RSM, Department of Religious Studies, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York, 11439; editorial correspondence to Maryanne Stevens, RSM, 9411 Ohio Street, Omaha, Nebraska, 68134. Layout and design by Judy Johns, Omaha, Nebraska and mailing by Mercy High School Monarch Mailing, Omaha, Nebraska.

Cottage Controversy: Unlocking the Mystery

Katherine Doyle, RSM

For those who are mystery addicts, *Cottage Controversy* provides an exercise in sleuthing. To begin a serious study of the small document attributed to Catherine McAuley opens a Pandora's box of questions without definitive answers. The questions fall into four key areas: validation of authorship; the dynamic of historical silence; the role of community memory in shaping the communal vision; and the relevance of the document for Mercy life today. None of these questions can be answered with our current data but they invite us to initiate a journey of discovery.

Cottage Controversy is a generally unknown document of Mercy history. An initial scanning of biographies on Mother Catherine reveals a mixed track record with some authors eliminating all references to its existence and others mentioning it in passing. None of the biographies give any explanation of the nature of the document or of its origin. Given this context, some background may be helpful.

The use of color and anecdote, the richness of description and language all point to the tale as one meant for entertainment and instruction.

The story is rooted in nineteenth century Ireland. It is a colorful tale of Margaret Lewis, a Catholic cottager living on an estate owned by the husband of Lady P., a Protestant of the zealous persuasion. The introduction sets the scene by describing both the beauty of the land and the characters of Margaret and Lady P. There is a streak of mischief in the story illustrated by the art of avoidance. In a series of six conversations Margaret finds excuse after excuse to avoid attending the required Wednesday night lecture given by Parson D. Since absence from the lectures means eviction from the cottage, Margaret works to be faithful to her religious beliefs, honest in her conversations and still retain possession of her house.

Other notable characters populate the story from Miss Edwards, "a person of no very great talent, natural or acquired," to the holy Father Peter and "Limping Joe, the barber. Woven in and out of the various events is an abundance of doctrinal thought usually dispensed to Lady P. by Margaret. The story is left unfinished.

The use of color and anecdote, the richness of description and language all point to the tale as one

meant for entertainment and instruction. According to the scant information available it was originally told in story form and only written down at the request of Sister Mary Vincent Deasy. In a letter to Sister Mary Vincent found in the preface to the 1883 edition and attributed to Catherine, we find the following:

"My Very Dear Sister,
When you heard the facts contained in this little Controversy related in conversation, you expressed such an ardent desire to have it in the form of a Tract, that immediately on my return I had it prepared for you. I earnestly hope it may be useful for your poor patients, who require something amusing as well as instructive; you may assure them that it is a true story, and that the distinguished personage, and the humble Margaret were living not long since."

The letter, signed "Your very affectionate, &c., &c. M. C. McAuley, is dated February, 1838.

In *Letters of Catherine McAuley, 1827-1841*, edited by Sister Mary Ignatia Neumann, a letter to Sister M. Josephine Warde seemingly alludes to the document. Catherine writes in the letter dated October 18, 1839: "Tell dear Sr. M. Vincent [Deasy] I am quite disappointed that she never writes me one little note. I fear she will not patronize my next work. I dare not venture to dedicate it to her, if she does not give me more encouragement."

Sr. Mary Ignatia goes on to connect the venture to the tract, *Cottage Controversy*, asserting that Catherine wrote the tract, but Sister Mary Vincent edited the work. This assertion remains unsubstantiated. Others who have accepted the authenticity of the document include Mother Austin Carroll, responsible for its 1883 edition and Angela Bolster who refers to the document in *Catherine McAuley, Venerable for Mercy*.³

While such evidence supports the theory of authentic authorship by Catherine, there exist areas of doubt. Three areas immediately come to mind: (1) the absence of an extant copy of the original 1838 document; (2) the silence of Mercy story-telling related to this document. (Three times it has been published, 1838, 1883 and 1964, and three times it has fallen out of memory); and (3) The failure of the document to play a role in the formation of Mercy imagination in education. Given current knowledge concerning the document, it seems to have had little or no significance for either the Sisters of her time or subsequent Mercy educators.

In order to address the doubts surrounding *Cottage Controversy* it is necessary to examine these concerns. The survival of an original copy of the doc-

ument seems unlikely at best. Mother Mary Austin Carroll, one of the early Mercy historians, makes no mention of the document in her life of Catherine written in 1866.⁴

This omission would indicate that knowledge of its existence came to her at a later date. According to Sister Mary Hermenia Muldrey this discovery came through Sister Mary Elizabeth Strange. In a letter Carroll wrote in 1882, she says: "Thanks to dear S.M. Elizabeth Strange I learned that Mother McAuley published a little book called *Cottage Controversy*—I sent for it in all directions and succeeded in getting it."⁵

This was no easy task for Muldrey, for obtaining information took two years of writing to England and Ireland. Due to the loss of Austin Carroll's letter collection in a zealous attic cleaning episode,⁶ it may never be known whether her first knowledge of a catechetical work by Catherine stemmed from her communication with Josephine and Frances Warde or whether it was entirely dependent upon Sister M. Elizabeth Strange.

Once in possession of the tract, Austin Carroll set about its republication. Copies were sent to at least three American bishops to gain letters of recommendation. These testimonial letters are found in the 1883 edition. Archbishop N. J. Perche of New Orleans, Bishop Eugene O'Connell of Grass Valley, Archbishop William Henry Elder of Cincinnati along with Ferreol Gerardey C.Ss.R. of New Orleans all received copies.⁷ Although the Mercy archives in Dublin, New Orleans and Washington possess only copies of the 1883 publication, it is possible that a copy of the original document might be found among the archival documents of one of these American prelates. The discovery of the original document would do much to dispel some of the mystery that exists.

The second concern is more difficult to address. If Mother Catherine authored the document it would seem that Mercy memory would have been more vigorous in preserving its story. If authentic, the document is concrete evidence of the content and method of evangelization used by Catherine and contains significant hints about her vision and style of education in faith. Since a story is a mirror of the storyteller, the document gives an insight into Catherine as a woman of her times in touch with the political, economic and religious temperament of her community. Within the context of the document much can be discerned about her understanding of key teachings of the faith. This was so notable that Gerardey noted: "There are, indeed, few books of the size that are so full of matter, or that so clearly elucidate in controversial points the Catholic doctrines."⁸ Yet the mystery remains. If all this is true, why is the tract wrapped in historical silence?

The limitation of the times, lack of access to the early publication or perhaps an inadequate sense of

history might account for the earliest edition of the tract disappearing from memory. In the midst of a congregation of action, a quaint story might be overlooked and fall out of the communal storytelling. Carroll's publication in 1883, however, occurs at a time when there is an attempt to preserve the heritage. The rediscovery of a book by one's foundress was significant. The Church leaders who received the book and wrote testimonials for it saw it as useful and effective, yet it seemingly did not capture attention within the community. The 1883 edition never became required reading for Mercy historians and educators.

In 1964 the document was published a third time. This attempt to bring *Cottage Controversy* to the awareness of Catherine's daughters preserves the document for us today and brings us to this moment of questioning.

To fully understand the story requires an understanding of nineteenth century Ireland and the dynamics of religious conflict at that time.

The reasons for historical silence are open to speculation but some tentative suggestions might be offered. The first possibility involves the story itself. The tract, based on the experience of cottagers in Ireland during the period of English rule, is both time and culture-bound. To fully understand the story requires an understanding of nineteenth century Ireland and the dynamics of religious conflict at that time. In a pluralistic American society the uniquely Irish nature of the document might have made it less useful for Mercy educators. This would not explain its disappearance from memory within Ireland.

Within an Irish culture smarting from the wounds of oppression and suffering, the sympathy expressed in the story toward Protestants of good will might not have been received enthusiastically. This reality would have been fueled by the onset of the potato famine and the depth of poverty and starvation which followed in its wake. Stories must reveal their truth by capturing the imagination of the listener. The tale of Margaret, a privileged cottager, might have been felt to be out of touch with the impoverished and grieving Irish people of the 1840's.

A second aspect which must be noted is the ecumenical tone of the tract. Inter-religious marriage, salvation outside of the Church and other topics of religious controversy are dealt with sensitively and with a vision that rivals that of contemporary ecumenical discourse. The foresight and vision of the document

might have been before its time.

While historical silence might be considered as grounds for discounting the authenticity of *Cottage Controversy*, it also might be seen as validating it. There seems to be no written challenge to its authorship or authenticity in the letters of the early Mercy leaders. There simply is no discussion of the document.

The third issue, that of influencing the Mercy vision of education, is more complex. Throughout the biographies of early Mercy educators in the United States, there are references to the unique style of Mercy education. While it is clear that it was marked by excellence and achievement, a listing of the unique characteristics of Mercy education is not easily obtained. Since the qualities are best obtained through anecdotal materials and the analysis of written manuscripts used by early Mercy educators, it would seem that *Cottage Controversy* would be an important source for scholarly research.

The silence surrounding *Cottage Controversy* becomes even more difficult to understand in the light of Mercy's commitment to religious education. The tract provides a model of evangelization and catechesis. Such a work has vast implications for defining the style and approach used in religious education within the Mercy tradition. It could be used as a context for determining what changes in approach came about over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An initial examination of the document reveals that it has much to offer in the area of catechetical process and storytelling.

... the most significant contribution of the tract may be its insight into a style of catechesis ...

Although the most significant contribution of the tract may be its insight into a style of catechesis, it offers other insights into the theological stance of its author. The small tract contains more than twenty Scripture quotations or references. Some of the passages are loosely quoted, others are retold in story form. An examination of the passages reveal the majority to be rooted in the Christian Scriptures with special focus on the Gospels of John and Matthew. Of the almost two dozen references, less than five are from the Hebrew scriptures.

While the tract reflects a strong reliance on Scripture, it does not give any hints about the source of its author's biblical knowledge. The main character, Margaret, usually indicates that her knowledge of the scriptures comes through the homilies of Father Peter.⁹

One comment in the story does give insight into how Catherine approached scriptural interpretation. In the introduction to the story is found the following statement:

*"...perhaps she expected a discussion, which she considered synonymous with uneasy victory for the celebrated rector of P., who soon made his appearance on a platform, prepared for the occasion. Unfortunately he could not be heard in the noisy and prolonged exultation of the people at the sight of roast beef, but no matter, after dinner would be even a better time for the parson, and the peeress, who stood at the door with a number of friends exulted that Father Peter should be forced to hear the unconnected texts so artfully chosen to puzzle the poor ignorant peasants."*¹⁰

This reference seems to indicate an understanding of the dangers of using scriptural texts outside of their context or using literal interpretation based on unrelated texts. It would be difficult to establish this, however, since the character of Catholic Margaret sometimes falls into a similar literalism.¹¹

A later statement indicates that a certain liberty was taken with scripture quotations when it was felt to be in the interest of children. Margaret once more is the speaker. She tells Lady P.: "And I understand now what you meant by our not getting the Scriptures rightly; because, all the Bible words of the first commandment are not in *Butler's Catechism*, which is the one we use in these parts; but everything in that is shortened, that the children may remember it. The whole of that commandment is in others, and I know it all by heart."¹²

When examining the theological understandings expressed in *Cottage Controversy*, it is evident that the document follows a type of apologetic model. The questions or issues that divided Catholic and Protestant religious thought are addressed within a story format. These questions ranged from how God speaks through the Church to Catholic veneration of Mary and the saints. Typical questions concerning indulgences, the swearing of oaths and salvation outside the Church are all skillfully presented. Flavor and humor are mixed with serious content in presenting the context evoking Margaret's explanation of Catholic belief.

A careful reading of the story brings up other themes which are not explicitly addressed but remain as echoes. The notion of freedom of conscience; the strict demands of justice and charity; the need to discern the difference between the personal view of Church leaders and that of the communal tradition are among those themes.

The latter theme is amplified by Margaret's insistence upon truth being the norm for belief and action. Although the place of the priest in *Cottage Controversy* is clearly one of authority and teaching, Margaret states: "My Lady, I have no more faith in

priests than my Savior desires me to have; nor have they more power than he gives them as his own agents on earth."¹³

Given what the document contains by way of religious thought and catechetical approach, it would seem to warrant a good deal of study, analysis and reflection. This study must not be limited to the document itself but must expand to examine why Mercy history fails repeatedly to add it to Catherine's memory. It challenges the researcher to ask: "What about this document blocks its easy assimilation into the stream of Mercy storytelling?" "Why has it not become a focus of serious study or research since its republication in 1964?" The answer to those questions may well challenge Mercy historians to look for themes and stances within our heritage that would have been uncomfortable with either the humorous tone or the religious vision found in *Cottage Controversy*.

If the tract is truly the work of Catherine, it reveals a political side of her that is more intense than any of her biographers have indicated. The language reveals a depth of feeling and passion about the abuse of a people. This feeling does not color the approach to persons, for they are judged on their own merits. It does apply to the economic situation of the time.

There is an irreverence and poking fun at the officious, whatever its origin. The character of Miss Mostyn illustrates this vividly. The hapless and bigoted Miss Mostyn had broken every norm of civility in a brief visit with Margaret. In the sixth and last conversation the author notes: "Lady P. came the next Tuesday, accompanied by Miss Edwards, of whose utility she was more than ever persuaded by the loquacity and folly of her young visitor, which had inconvenienced her in more plans than Lewis's cottage."¹⁴

Miss Mostyn was not the only perpetrator, however. Limping Joe did his part as well. His stance of ridicule for those who did not agree with him as well as his tendency to gossip earned him the following description: "[Joe] wrote a lampoon on the village barn, in which the metre, like the author, was very lame; mimicked Miss Edwards, and shaved upon Sunday. He was even less indebted to that of the

priest; indeed, on one occasion, when that reverend gentleman had been put to a great deal of trouble in composing a quarrel, which he traced Joe's tattling, he was heard to say, that Joe and a certain lady, whose name he did not mention, would create confusion among the blessed in paradise."¹⁵ The earthiness of the document and the blending of the theological teaching with the daily events of cottage life portray a spirituality which weds faith with life. The story form brings this home to the reader in a way that challenges the tendency to take everything too seriously.

What has been said in this paper has been said by way of invitation. *Cottage Controversy* can be read and put aside or it can be mined for information, perspective and insight. To choose the former would be a loss. To choose the latter cannot help but enrich our understanding of communal memory and storytelling. Even if the authenticity of the document as Catherine's cannot be established definitively, it is a work of Mercy creation which can tell us about ourselves. What it tells us about ourselves is yet to be discovered.

Footnotes

1. McAuley, Catherine, *Cottage Controversy*, Edited by Mother Mary Teresa Austin Carroll. Reprint publication. (Washington: Sisters of Mercy, 1964), p. 4.
2. Neumann, Sister Mary Ignatia. *Letters of Catherine McAuley*. (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), p. 172.
3. Bolster, Angela, *Catherine McAuley, Venerable for Mercy*. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990), p. 97.
4. Carroll, Mother Mary Teresa Austin, *Life of Catherine McAuley*. (New York: D. and J. Sadlier and Co.), 1880 ed.
5. Muldrey, Sister Mary Hermania. *Abounding in Mercy: Mother Austin Carroll*. (New Orleans: Habersham, 1988), p. 204.
6. Muldrey to Doyle, private correspondence, May 23, 1991.
7. *Cottage Controversy*, Introductory pages.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., pp. 15-39.
10. Ibid., p. 8.
11. Ibid., p. 34.
12. Ibid., p. 64.
13. Ibid., p. 31.
14. Ibid., p. 89.
15. Ibid., p. 69.

Quaker Influences Upon Catherine McAuley

Rita Valade, RSM

There is no doubt that the Callaghans, with whom Catherine McAuley resided for twenty years were Protestant. What has been argued recently is the level of influence Mrs. Callaghan's Quakerism had on Catherine McAuley. The degree to which Mrs. Callaghan did or did not participate in the life of the Society of Friends actually is not a concern to McAuley students. What is of concern are the predisposing factors which influenced Catherine's approach to her relationship with ecclesial authorities, and the structure, governance, and community of the Sisters of Mercy. There do appear to be strong indications that Catherine was influenced by various aspects of Quakerism. This influence will be identified through a brief overview of the Society of Friends followed by a discussion of parallels between them and the Sisters of Mercy.

Prior to this endeavor, it is important to recall the religious milieu of Catherine's time. Despite the new freedoms which were being accorded Catholics in Ireland during the latter half of the eighteenth century with the gradual repeal of the penal code, Catholics continued to experience social ostracism from Protestants. Nuns were included in this anti-Catholic prejudice, viewed with suspicion because of the secretiveness of their lives within the cloister, being papists, and being non-productive in meeting the needs of society. It was in this milieu that Catherine McAuley lived and founded the Sisters of Mercy.

As all persons . . . possess the potential . . . to be vehicles of God's word, all persons are to be respected in their opinions and treated justly.

Quakerism

By Catherine's time, the Society of Friends had been established for approximately 150 years and was a small but influential religious denomination in England, Ireland, the United States,¹ and other English-speaking countries. It evolved as an alternative to the Established Religion (Church of England) and focused upon George Fox's (1624-1691) convictions that all persons have the potential for speaking God's truth...for possessing the Inner Light. Like all Protestants, the Quakers held scripture was absolutely essential in order to verify the workings of one's experience of the Inner Light. But it was only one source

of revelation, since for Quakers revelation is a continual process. As all persons (regardless of religious beliefs, social standing, or gender) possess the potential, if open to the Spirit, to be vehicles of God's word, all persons are to be respected in their opinions and treated justly. Fox also believed that action was an extension of speech, so Christian behavior was essential to living out the Inner Light. Other "Seekers of the Light" resonated with his beliefs and the Quaker movement began.

Authority

Friends joined together in unstructured meetings with no presiding minister. Silence was the norm and all shared the responsibility for listening and speaking in response to the Spirit's prompting. "Here was a religious democracy...It has often been said that the Quakers, who were fiercely lay in their character...were the most radical implementers of the 'priesthood of all believers'."²

These beliefs permeated the way in which the Society of Friends related to each other and to their world. From its earliest days, women were considered to be equal to men as potential vehicles of God's truth. Women were always free to minister in the Meeting, but both George Fox and his wife Margaret Fell agreed that women would probably feel freer to speak their concerns among other women. Women's Meetings were held separately from Men's while joint Meetings continued on a regular basis. In Women's Meetings, especially the Business Meetings, women were completely responsible for their own discipline, organization, missioning to other localities and outreach to those in need. However, in some instances final approval of decisions reached by Women's Meetings needed the affirmation of the Men's Meetings to become official.

Structure

Meetings were organizationally autonomous from each other. They dealt with their own local concerns in addition to striving to preserve a unity of spirit within the Society. Possessing no hierarchy or overarching structure by which fidelity to Quaker belief and lifestyle was monitored, Meetings sent authorized Visitors, circulated letters to one another, and may have sent delegates to the Yearly Meeting in London.

Governance

Communal discernment was (and remains) an important aspect of Quakerism. Persons requesting marriage, permission to go on visitation to other Quaker communities, or to be sent on mission to new territories required the approval of their local Meeting.

Based on the theology of the Inner Light, each person had an opportunity to speak to the issue at hand. If necessary, the elected Clerk of the Meeting was authorized to make the final decision in consultation with the community.

Letter writing and journals were two important methods of preserving and fostering the orthodoxy of the Quaker communities.

Community

Flowing from their structure and approach to governance, Friends made extended visits to one another. Visitations were long enough for the Visitors to become knowledgeable of the community in order to inquire of their spiritual condition and to counsel with them on fresh things that God might be asking of them.³ Letter writing and journals were two important methods of preserving and fostering the orthodoxy of the Quaker communities. These writings were usually intended to be shared among the members and were often sources of encouragement, support and challenge to remain authentic to the Inner Light. Many shared the events of what other communities were enduring or how they were ministering.

In summary, Quakerism believed that Christ's Spirit can speak to and through any individual who was open to the Inner Light and stressed the integrity of word and action. Supporting the importance of every person, Quakerism offered a more liberated view of women than Reformation Protestantism or Catholicism. In essence, women were viewed and treated as people who were capable of self-governance and worthy of receiving revelation. Possessing no centralized or hierarchical system of governance, each Meeting communally discerned decisions that would affect the Society. Fidelity to the Inner Light and Quaker life was encouraged through personal visits and correspondence. Being autonomous, each Meeting developed creative methods to maintain a Quaker unity within the context of their surrounding culture.

Parallels between Catherine and Quakerism

Undoubtedly, Catherine McAuley was a true daughter of the Irish/Roman Catholic church of her time. She believed its basic tenets, gave deference to the hierarchy, and desired all of her endeavors to be blessed by the church. Roman Catholicism was the faith tradition through which she chose to envision her life and ministry.

However, it appears that she was also affected by

other influences as her approach to church hierarchy, and the structure and governance of her sisters were not particularly normative for Roman Catholics, especially women. Her perspectives on these issues seems reflective of Quaker philosophy. Egalitarian attitudes toward women, organizationally autonomous Meetings, and the promotion of unity among members through non-authoritarian means certainly find their parallel in Catherine's approach to the Mercy community.

To Catherine, contemporary religious life in the early 1800's, with its hierarchical and cloistered structure, would not have appeared to foster either the community spirit or the innovative approaches to being with and among the poor that she desired. We need to recall Catherine's initial aversion to conventual life to realize the amount of fresh air that she helped enter into the church. As reflected in the Dublin Manuscript, "She was convinced that to carry on the Institute she must be a Religious...She was no longer young; her habits were formed among Protestants; she did not like ceremony and some of the ceremonies used in convents, such as kneeling to Superiors, were distasteful to her..."⁴

Or, as in the Moore Letters in London, Mary Clare reflects on Catherine's novitiate at George's Hill: "She often said it was so hard a struggle for her to remain on account of meeting there many things repugnant to her feelings, that had she not the establishment of the Institute most deeply at heart she would that very evening have sent for a coach to take her back to Baggot Street."⁵

Needless to say, Catherine did not replicate in the Institute the relationship with authority, structure, governance or community style that she experienced during her novitiate.

Relationship with Authority

As we have already seen, the role of women in the Society of Friends was very different from that of nineteenth century Irish Catholicism. The equality of the sexes which Quakerism fostered may have influenced Catherine's relationships with church hierarchy. Teasingly referring to herself as "Fr. McAuley," Catherine led the annual retreat at Baggot Street in August, 1841, a privilege reserved exclusively for clerics during her time.⁶ She definitely related to clerics as equals. "Her habit of signing herself simply 'C. McAuley' gave one clergyman his cue. According to Miss [Frances] Warde, who was present when Catherine received the letter, he addressed her C. McAuley, Esq. and proceeded to lecture her on the masculine character of works of philanthropy, business, and finance."⁷

While Catherine did not always care for the personalities of the clerics she encountered, and was judicious in her business dealings with pastors and bishops, she generally acquiesced to their requests as signs

of God's will. However, Catherine did not passively consent to clerical decisions when they would interfere with her mission. She encouraged her sisters to be reverential towards clerics, but to engage them in frank discussion about issues if there was a major breach of justice.⁸

Catherine consistently assumed that she would be taken seriously and treated as an equal by bishops. Two examples nine years apart illustrate this stance of possessing a sense of personal equality with bishops: her 1830 request for a pontifical blessing and her renewed efforts for the approval of the Rule and Constitutions in 1839. In neither of these instances did Catherine channel her requests through Daniel Murray, the Archbishop of Dublin. In the second example, it was her long-time friend, Dr. Blake who encouraged her to involve Murray. "But as the sincere friend of your Institute, I think it my duty to suggest rather the regular and most approved mode usually adopted on such occasions, of having your petition sanctioned and corroborated by the joint request and signature of your venerable Archbishop."⁹

It appears that Catherine simply regarded herself as the appropriate person, possessing the necessary authority to request papal approbation and episcopal support from the Bishops of Ireland and London, without the joint request of her local ordinary.

This sense of self and personal authority in relation to clerical, episcopal, and pontifical matters would not have been normative for nineteenth century Irish women raised in an exclusively Catholic milieu. The promotion of egalitarianism by the Society of Friends, in addition to the influence of being raised in a Protestant milieu, seems to have quietly but surely made an impact upon Catherine McAuley's ecclesiological presuppositions.

The loose organizational structure of Quakerism possesses some commonalities with the Roman Catholic tradition of monasticism.

Structure

The loose organizational structure of Quakerism possesses some commonalities with the Roman Catholic tradition of monasticism. Both structures promote autonomous groupings of self-governing members and flexibility in response to local needs. Catherine and her associates chose such a structure for the Sisters of Mercy, contrary to the centralization

movement occurring in the church at the time. In a letter to Frances Warde in 1838, Catherine states, "Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to when possible."¹⁰ The ministry of each foundation included education and the visitation of the sick poor, in addition to whatever else the local church needed. In other words, Sisters of Mercy were to respond to the circumstances and needs of the people in their local area in any way possible.

In structuring the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley appears to have integrated Roman Catholic, Quaker, and other influences. Unlike the post-Tridentine model of uniformity throughout the church, union and charity were to be the guiding principles of the congregation. What was a dramatic departure from the norms of the eighteenth century Irish church was that all this was done by and for women. As it evolved, the Sisters of Mercy was the first congregation to receive papal approbation as a congregation of religious sisters.¹¹

Governance

Catherine never authoritatively interfered in the running of a foundation unless there was a major breach in fidelity to the Mercy spirit of mission. It can be seen that whenever the mission of Mercy was jeopardized, whether by clerical or internal forces, Catherine acted strongly and with conviction. She firmly preferred to operate out of a sense of subsidiarity unless there were grave reasons to intervene (e.g., Bermondsey). Generally speaking, Catherine acted as a unifying but not controlling figure for the congregation, allowing foundations to grow and change according to their own wisdom and needs.

Collegiality and consensual decision-making were normative for Quakers and for the women at Baggot Street during the years prior to and after the establishment of the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine fostered this attitude of collegiality among her sisters. It was the group which made decisions on a variety of issues related to its communal life in mission and consequently a spirit of cooperation and unity grew among the members. Decisions would range from very important concerns such as the choice of Rule for the congregation and who to send to a new foundation, to the less significant such as naming the convent in Cork "Baggot Street," and who would answer the door when Catherine was threatened by debtor's prison.

Superiors were to govern with a light hand, using humor when possible.¹² She once stated: "It is better not to make too many laws. If you draw the string too tight, it will break."¹³ Quakerism proposed few rules, focusing upon the Inner Light and community as the guiding principles for living. Catherine's own belief in the equality of all the sisters and the potential wisdom of all, was demonstrated when she "enjoined one of the junior sisters to tell her of any fault or omission of duty she might perceive."¹⁴

Community

Flowing from the autonomy of foundations possessing no overarching hierarchical structure, the promotion of unity rather than uniformity was Catherine's interest. Union and charity were to be the hallmarks of the Sisters of Mercy. Similar to the Society of Friends' manner of establishing new Meetings and the promotion of Visitations, Catherine would accompany the sisters to new foundations. She would remain with them for extended periods of time, preferring to complete the 30-day prayer prior to leaving. This time period would allow the sisters to establish themselves and permit all, including Catherine, to become acquainted with the personality and needs of the local church. Catherine's presence offered a sense of support and encouragement to the new house. Whenever possible, she would return to visit and would write frequently.

Similar to the Quakers, sisters were encouraged to visit one another.

Visitation of the foundations was not Catherine's exclusive responsibility. Similar to the Quakers, sisters were encouraged to visit one another. Some felt very strongly that newer sisters should travel to other foundations to see Mercy alive in other locales.¹⁵ Dr. Browne, the Bishop of Galway, once proclaimed: "It is impossible the Order of Sisters of Mercy should fail where there is such unity; and such affectionate interest is maintained as brings them one hundred miles to encourage and aid one another. And this is their established practice: to look after what has been newly commenced."¹⁶

The role of correspondence was another indication of Quaker influence upon maintaining unity among the sisters. Catherine was a prolific letter writer and urged others to be the same. These letters ranged from almost pure folly in verse to the consideration of very serious concerns facing either Baggot Street or other foundations. She also initiated Foundation Circulars which would include updates on the other houses and some spiritual word of encouragement which was intended to be read by all. Sisters were also recommended to write to one another, not just to Catherine.

Through visitations, frequent letter writing and Foundation Circulars, all trademarks of Quakerism, Catherine was kept abreast of the major activities of each foundation and she, in turn, offered guidance, support and news of other houses. In this sense she maintained a centralizing influence, ensuring fidelity to the spirit of the congregation.

Summary

In summary, I propose that while Catherine was clearly Roman Catholic in her beliefs, she appears to have been influenced by Quakerism. This influence appears in her sense of personal authority, which in turn may have influenced her relationship with church hierarchy and the way in which she structured, governed, and facilitated community life of the Sisters of Mercy. We may never know the extent to which Catherine was directly exposed to Quakerism, but the parallels presented in this paper indicate that Catherine was certainly open to various life-giving aspects of her surrounding ecclesiological and cultural milieus. What we do know is that she passionately loved God and God's poor. For these, she was open to influences which would facilitate innovative approaches to mission and community.

Footnotes

1. Women were the first Quakers to reach the American colonies. (Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 24.
 2. Steere, Douglas (ed.) *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings; Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 13-14.
 3. Steere, *Quaker Spirituality*, p. 24.
 4. Dublin Manuscript, pp.14-15, in Angela Bolster, *Positio: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of Catherine McAuley* (Rome, 1985), p. 93. (Copy located at the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas National Office, Silver Spring, MD.)
 5. Moore Letters, September 13, 1844. In Mary Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957) pp. 113-114.
 6. Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands*, p. 249.
 7. Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands*, p. 106.
 8. Bolster, Angela, ed., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley*. (Dioceses of Cork and Ross: Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, 1989), p. 34-35. Letter to S.M.dePazzi, Catherine's assistant at Baggot Street, encouraging dePazzi to speak to a cleric on behalf of their need for a chaplain.
 9. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 98-99.
 10. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 74.
 11. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, S.V. "Religious Sisters," by W. B. Ryan.
 12. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 75.
 13. London/Bermondsey Manuscript, p. 13, in Carmel Bourke, *A Woman Sings of Mercy* (Sydney, Australia: E.J.Dwyer), p. 70.
 14. Dublin Manuscript, in Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands*, p. 142.
 15. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 153.
 16. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 223. Letter to S. Frances Warde.
-

Echoes of Celtic Christianity in the Life and Work of Catherine McAuley

Julia Upton, RSM

This article has its origins in our on-going conversation about Catherine McAuley: how she lived, what she read, and the ways she prayed. I come to the circle of conversation as a systematic theologian and daughter of Catherine. During our sometimes intensive, occasionally heated discussions, I have often found myself to be distracted by a distant sound, what I can best call faint echoes. While the historian focuses on facts, the theologian characteristically listens to such echoes.

Echoes are faint, soft, fuzzy, if you will. They aren't heard as much as suspected, and only when you suspect them do you actually listen for them, but even then it is still difficult to pinpoint the echo's source. As sound grows from its source, it expands, with the effect of surrounding the hearer. In order to discover the source, you must both look carefully and listen intently.

During our conversations about Catherine McAuley's life and work, and even more strongly in my own reading of her, I hear echoes of Celtic Christianity. My purpose in this article, however, is not to prove that there are echoes. Rather, I suggest that there are echoes of Celtic Christianity in the life and work of Catherine McAuley. You will have to listen for yourself to see if you can hear them too.

I begin by explaining what is meant by Celtic Christianity and how a specific type of spirituality took shape in Ireland. I will turn to Catherine's life and work, and invite you to listen for the echoes I hear. Finally, I suggest some possibilities for understanding ourselves, the mission, and our tradition differently as we stand surrounded by the echoes of the past.

The Celtic Church

The people whom we so casually call "Celts" surely never even thought of themselves as such. Prior to the Roman invasion, they probably considered themselves members of a particular tribe. Although their origins are hard to establish with certainty, and not the task at hand here, they are best seen as a grouping of tribes or a family of peoples moving throughout time and adapting to new parameters.¹ These various tribes, it is generally believed, emerged from Central Europe, more specifically from what is now eastern France, Switzerland, Bohemia, Austria and southeastern Germany, beginning around 500 B.C. They reached their height about 200 years later, eventually settling in what we know as Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Northern England or Northumbria.

During what is pejoratively called the Dark Ages,

a different kind of Christianity flourished in the Celtic lands, especially in Ireland. In the mid-fifth century,² when St. Patrick was on his mission to Christianize Ireland, the Roman Empire was crumbling and the barbarians were overrunning Europe. Beyond the pale of Roman influence, Christianity became inculturated in Ireland. The Gospel message did not change, but it was ignited by a Celtic fire³ with the result that the Christian faith burned differently in the hearts and lives of the Celtic people.⁴ A brief look at church organization, leadership, and theology will give you a sense of the difference involved.

It was pagan Celtic belief that women were equal to men and had similar legal rights . . .

The mission to Ireland came from Gaul, essentially an urban church. Influenced by the Roman idea of political structure, the continental church took shape around major cities and towns, under the leadership of a bishop. This ecclesial organization did not adapt well to a land of scattered farms and hilltop fortresses, where there were no cities, towns or even villages.⁵ More compatible to this simple, agrarian form of life was the monastic society indigenous to the Syrian and Egyptian desert, with abbots and abbesses as local religious leaders rather than bishops sent as envoys by Rome. Nowhere is this difference more obvious than in church buildings. Compare the huge Roman basilica St. Mary Major, for example, with the humble stone chapel St. Kevin's Kitchen at Glendalough, County Wicklow, which date from about the same period, and you will have a good idea of the significant difference between these two understandings of "church."

A similar distinction can also be seen in the understanding of leadership. Rather than being rejected by the Celtic Church, the pagan Druidic religion continued to be respected, and many of its ideas, attitudes, symbols and rituals were even absorbed into Celtic Christianity over time. This was most evidenced in the role of women and the pattern of ministry which developed in Ireland. It was pagan Celtic belief that women were equal to men and had similar legal rights, so it was almost axiomatic that the Celtic church would encourage the leadership of women. Since tribal leadership was spiritual rather than temporal,

Druidic leaders functioned in a shamanic role within the tribe. Both men and women were mediators, knowers, and wisdom figures. Some specialized as judges, prophets, teachers and poets, with no one person filling all these roles.⁶

The "theology" of the Celtic Church was certainly "catholic," but with a heavier accent on Scripture and asceticism than found in the continental church.⁷ It is also important to note the influence of Pelagius on the Celtic Church. He was a Celtic Briton who was converted to Christianity along with the Roman Empire, but remained critical of the dichotomy he saw between Gospel morality and the lavish lifestyle of the Roman bishops and priests. Particularly abhorrent to him was the newly fashionable doctrine of original sin. Instead, Pelagius believed that Jesus challenges each person to choose between good and evil. Although he was condemned as a heretic, his devotion to the person of Jesus along with his understanding of individual freedom remained essential characteristics of the Celtic approach to Christianity.⁸

There were other theological differences between the Roman and Celtic Church as well. They did not agree on the dating of Easter, for example. Other issues which separated the two churches were tonsure, celebration of the sabbath on Saturday, communion under both kinds, failure to enforce clerical celibacy, and indications that women functioned as regional deaconesses.⁹ However, what really separated the two, although not articulated at the time, was a matter of ethos. The Celts were at root a tribal people and that in itself threatened the Roman Church. While bishops had ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the abbots or abbesses had the actual power, functioning as tribal chiefs. Celtic monastic settlements had a large, lay, non-celibate, family population, with leadership handed down through kinship lines. Autonomy and individuality were its hallmarks.¹⁰

Spirituality is not limited to how we pray or worship, but is also reflected in how we work and play, live and love.

The Church of Rome, as you might imagine, was not well disposed to these differences, but the Celtic Church at that time had a wide sphere of influence. During the Dark Ages it was the Celtic Church that kept learning alive, and monastic settlements were noted as important schools and centers of learning. Celtic missionaries spread over England even more widely than continental missionaries from the south. By the mid sixth-century, however, following the death of several important abbots from plague and the

appointment of the first native Englishman as archbishop of Canterbury in 653, the sphere of Roman influence was strengthened. The Celtic fire was "officially" extinguished in 664 A.D. at the Synod of Whitby, where the Celtic Church was suppressed, or brought into line with Rome, depending on your way of seeing the events of that time.¹¹

While the Celtic Church as such ceased to exist at the Synod of Whitby, embers of that Celtic fire still burned unsuspected, surviving in the spirituality of the people. It is inaccurate, in fact, to speak of Celtic spirituality in the past tense. Although some refer to it as existing only in the remote past, Celtic spirituality is very much a present reality. As Esther de Waal has taken care to note, Celtic spirituality is not primitive, but primal.¹²

The Survival of Celtic Spirituality

Before listing the characteristics of Celtic spirituality, let me give you my framework for discussing spirituality in general. In its broadest sense, I understand "spirituality" as the meaning system we develop in order to understand ourselves, our relationships with God, other people and creation, and our way of making sense out of what happens within and around us. As Edward C. Sellner has written, "It is about the way we live and interpret the world and the sacred mystery that surrounds us."¹³ Spirituality is not limited to how we pray or worship, but is also reflected in how we work and play, live and love.

There are seven characteristics which have been identified as strains of Celtic spirituality. These have been culled from the stories and sayings of the saints—wisdom figures who were influenced directly or indirectly by the Celtic Church.¹⁴

One significant characteristic of Celtic spirituality is the way in which it reflects a deep love and respect for the physical environment. They approached life with a sense of reverence, aware of the divine residing in everything. "Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are," writes the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset. Reflecting on the landscape of Western Ireland, Edward Sellner writes:

Being so close to that broad expanse of water, its depths, its tides, the pounding of white-crested surf can elicit in a person the sense of creation's overwhelming power. Its brooding, lonely emptiness makes a people receptive to mysticism Where the land ends and horizons fade away, people experience transcendence too. Creation itself opens one's eyes to the Creator, leads one to an experience of awe and gratitude, invites a person to begin the search for a loving, creative power whose presence is felt in one's very fiber, whose power is physically visible to the naked eye.¹⁵

They also loved learning, a second characteristic of Celtic spirituality. Monastic schools flourished from

the fifth to the twelfth centuries, especially in Christian Ireland. In their monastic scriptoria both pagan Celtic legends and Christian hagiographies were first transcribed. According to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, many pilgrim scholars came to Ireland from Britain and Europe to study and learn.

The Celts also seemed to have an innate yearning to explore the unknown. This penchant for wandering abroad was not for the purposes of establishing an empire, as James Mackey notes,¹⁶ but might be due either to the migratory patterns worn in their spirits by their ancestors, or the resulting spiritual heritage of Abraham and Sarah, Moses, and the missionary journeys of the apostles, to name a few.¹⁷ They had a remarkable ability to assimilate and to enrich whatever peoples they encountered, while leaving all essential differences intact.¹⁸

A fourth characteristic is a love of silence and of solitude. It was common practice for Celtic monasteries to have a place set apart as a retreat or *dysert*, where a monk or nun could go for solitude. These early Christian Celts shared what the scholar John Ryan calls a "surprising" combination of "apostolic and anchoretical ideals," which was original in Ireland.¹⁹

Since they saw time as made holy by a loving God, they valued the daily, the routine, the ordinary.

The Celtic understanding of time is another characteristic of their spirituality. The dualities of time and eternity, this world and the "other" world, and pagan and Christian, which we find so pervasive in our culture were of no consequence to the Celts.²⁰ They understood time as a sacred reality already redeemed by God's overflowing compassion. They lived as though there is a fullness *now* to all of time. They even interpreted history differently than we do, making contemporaries of those who historically never could have been.²¹

A characteristic which follows upon this is their appreciation of ordinary life. Since they saw time as made holy by a loving God, they valued the daily, the routine, the ordinary. Gratitude overflows from their stories, and their stories tell of meeting God in the ordinariness of their daily lives.²²

Lastly, we see reflected a strong belief in the value of kinship relations, particularly the spiritual ties of soul friends (*anamcharas*). One element of this was the fosterage system in which children of one family were brought up by another family or tribe. They

believed that such exchanges not only strengthened alliances but introduced each child to a wider world of learning. Related to this were the mentoring relationships which are such a significant contribution of Celtic spirituality.²³ In the tribal culture they functioned as mediators between the tribes and the spiritual realm. These types of mentoring relationships survived when Christianity arrived. Each of the early saints seems to have had at least one personal mentor, a wiser, more experienced, sometimes older teacher, confessor, or spiritual guide. Some of the saints also had angelic soul friends, and many saw a value to dreams as sources of spiritual wisdom.²⁴

With those seven strains of Celtic spirituality identified and described, we turn our attention now to Catherine McAuley.

Listening for Echoes in Catherine McAuley

One of my frustrations in listening for the echoes of Celtic Christianity in the life and work of Catherine McAuley has been the question of sources. I am indebted to the work of others, who have had direct access to primary source material, and have synthesized it so well for us.²⁵ In addition to their work I am also relying on Catherine McAuley's writings: her correspondence²⁶ and the monograph, "The Cottage Controversy." I have intentionally not placed too much emphasis on the *Familiar Instructions* and *Retreat Instructions* because they are transcriptions made by other sisters.

I met Catherine McAuley when I was thirty-four years old, and immediately felt a kinship with her. Although she was not the first Sister of Mercy I met, she was the first I came to know. Three things about her impressed me immediately: her sense of balance, her creative approach to ministry, and her deep love for others. I now hear in them echoes of Celtic Christianity. Although these are not by any means the only echoes I hear in her life and work, my intention is to begin the conversation, not to have the last word.

Catherine's sense of balance and the image of the see-saw helped me to understand that balance is primarily a matter of being centered and rooted. Catherine McAuley was surely centered in God and rooted in the Gospel, reminding us ever so gently that "we have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back."²⁷ That sense of balance is reflected well in the "daily distribution of time,"²⁸ where we see that the sisters spent as much time in contemplation as they did in action. Catherine knew that the temptation would always be for us to go to one extreme or the other. In her day, the temptation was the extreme of appropriating the ascetical practices of cloistered communities: fasting, hair shirts, self-flagellation, etc. She rightly recognized that these could diminish the quality of service one might render in the mission of mercy.

Instead, she encouraged an asceticism of compassion among the sisters.²⁹

Hers was hardly a smooth passage through this world, and in establishing the Institute of Mercy there were many rugged sections of road for Catherine. There were problems with ecclesiastical authorities both at home and in Rome, as well as struggles with sickness and death in her family and among the sisters. Catherine never lost hope or abandoned the vision, but was always reminding her associates that

*without the Cross the real Crown cannot come. Some great thing which He designs to accomplish would have been too much without a little bitter in the cup. Bless and love the fatherly Hand which has hurt you. He will come with both Hands filled with favours and blessings.*³⁰

"Turn what you can into a jest!" "Dance every evening." Such balanced advice abounds in Mother McAuley's letters, along with amusing and whimsical poetry, as it does in the lives stories and sayings of the other Celtic saints.

Even in physical surroundings Catherine notes the importance of balance. In giving the details of the Limerick foundation she writes:

*A very nice old convent, enclosed by the walls of an abbey: a beautiful ruin.... A very large weeping ash hanging over the Grace; it looks delightful and excites meditation of the most consoling kind. A very nice chapel and choir, good garden and extensive school rooms.... the house is surrounded by trees, etc., walking round, and all enclosed with fine old walls entirely lined with ivy.*³¹

In describing new foundations, in general, Catherine usually makes reference to gardens and trees as necessary for restoring the spirit. In other contexts she often evidences concern that a sister might need an extended "change of air" before continuing her work.

Sometimes Catherine needed to be reminded of that herself, as we read in a letter addressed to her from Andrew Fitzgerald, O.P., president of Carlow College:

*But you must sometimes think that you carry the treasures of God in a fragile vessel liable to break and chink, and requiring frequent repairs, to effect which you cannot have leisure amid the various intrusions of those immediately about you. Break away from them and come down to the calm, quiet residence of your children here. A few days with us will renovate mind and body, and send you home fresh for new toils. Remember God has given you charge of the health you employ in His service.... Now, my dearest old friend, in unison with all here I earnestly beg of you to have compassion on yourself....*³²

"If you build it, he will come" was the haunting theme of the motion picture hit *Field of Dreams*.

Catherine McAuley's "field of dreams" was the House of Mercy on Lower Baggot Street in the fashionable section of Dublin. She built it and they came—associates drawn out of curiosity or by the spirit, and the poor, sick and ignorant invited to share her wealth. If anything, Catherine was enterprising, and in an "environment that did not expect independent action by its women, much less creative initiatives."³³

There are dozens of examples of her creative initiatives: traveling abroad to France to study educational methods; sending young sisters off on new foundations; opening a laundry to provide employment, training for the poor while generating income for the mission; taking risks again and again in making foundations, especially in the "wilds" of Nova Scotia. Despite failing health, she was on the road, or with the pen, encouraging, enlivening, comforting.

... she (Catherine) saw that it was the blending of the community's gifts that would aid in the mission of mercy.

Catherine had a remarkable love for all people. She found the presence of God even in the most wretched outcasts of society. Because she believed that poverty, sickness and ignorance prevented a person's authentic spirit from shining through, she saw them as "enemies to be overcome so that the divine spark would inform all of life ever more brightly."³⁴

Similarly, she saw that it was the blending of the community's gifts that would aid in the mission of mercy. She therefore encouraged acceptance of each sister's weakness, whether physical or spiritual, and the development of her unique talents, priding union and charity as values to be upheld above all others. "Catherine succeeded in creating a sense of common endeavor where each one discovered a sense of being significant and purposeful."³⁵

Catherine, we assume, had wonderful friendships and some treasured soul-friendships as well, as her correspondence seems to indicate, particularly with Mother Frances Warde and Dr. Andrew Fitzgerald, O.P. That would probably be easier for us to see if we could examine the complete corpus of letters exchanged between them. Her tender regard for so many of the sisters further demonstrates how she saw friendship as expanding the soul.

Continuing to Listen

In a recent book the psychologist Rollo May explains the important place "myth" has in our lives. He goes so far as to describe it as an "urgent need" we

have in our day. May states, "Myths are essential to the process of keeping our souls alive and bringing us new meaning in a difficult and often meaningless world" because myth, or story, "carries the values of the society" and through it the individual finds his [or her] sense of identity. Because myth transcends time it "unites the antinomies of life: conscious and unconscious, historical and present, individual and social. These are formed into a narration which is passed down from age to age."³⁶

Perhaps you hear the same echoes that I hear in listening to these stories of our foundation. Looking at the same material, other scholars make different connections. Some attribute Catherine's approach to the mission of mercy to her years of living in a Quaker household, others to her spiritual reading. More important than establishing the connections, May would argue, is the importance of telling the story. Only then will we know who we are and what we can become.

Footnotes

1. Caitlin Matthews, *The Celtic Tradition* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1991) viii-1.
2. Because we are dependent on an oral and not a written tradition for our information, there is a general lack of precision about people, places and events. Be aware that the lines between fact and fiction often blur.
3. This vivid metaphor is used repeatedly by Robert Van de Weyer in his book *Celtic Fire: The Passionate Religious Vision of Ancient Britain and Ireland* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).
4. For a thorough historical discussion of this phenomenon see Nora K. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
5. Van de Weyer, p. 5.
6. Matthews, pp. 36-37.
7. Christopher Bamford and William Parker Marsh, *Celtic Christianity: Ecology and Holiness* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1987) p. 24.
8. Van de Wyde, p. 6.
9. Matthews, p. 96.
10. Bamford, pp. 25-26.
11. Margaret Deanesly, *A History of the Medieval Church 590-1500* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969) pp. 46-48.

12. See Esther de Waal, *Every Earthly Blessing: Celebrating a Spirituality of Creation* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992).
13. Edward C. Sellner, *Mentoring: The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship* (Notre Dame, Ave Maria Press, 1990) p. 18.
14. Edward C. Sellner, *Wisdom of the Celtic Saints* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1993) p. 21. See also *Carmina Gadelica*, edited by Alexander Carmichael (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1992).
15. Sellner, *Mentoring*, p. 64.
16. James P. Mackey, "Is There a Celtic Christianity?" in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, edited by James P. Mackey (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1989) p. 18.
17. Sellner, *Wisdom*, p. 23.
18. Mackey, p. 19.
19. John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism: Origins and Early Development* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1931) p. 407f.
20. See de Waal, pp. 129-137.
21. Sellner, *Wisdom*, p. 24.
22. Sellner, *Wisdom*, p. 25.
23. See Edward C. Sellner's *Mentoring* for a complete discussion of this contribution.
24. Sellner, *Wisdom*, pp. 26-27.
25. See M. Angela Bolster, RSM, *Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990); Sister Mary 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); 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).
26. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1827 - 1841*, edited by Sister M. Angela Bolster (Cork: Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, 1988) hereafter referred to as *Letters*.
27. *Letters*, p. 178, 20 December 1840.
28. See *Letters*, pp. 162-163.
29. See discussion in *Tender Courage*, pp. 106-110.
30. *Letters*, p. 126, 21 March 1840.
31. *Letters*, p. 67, 12 October 1838.
32. *Letters*, p. 146, 4 August 1840.
33. *Tender Courage*, p. 7.
34. *Tender Courage*, p. 98.
35. *Tender Courage*, p. 51.
36. Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (New York: Norton, 1991) pp. 20-27.

Hearing Silky Footsteps¹ **The Mystery of God in Celtic Consciousness**

Moira Hunt

People have always been fascinated by the nature of the Divine. God has been questioned, discussed, debated, tested and proved time and time again throughout the course of human history. One has to marvel at the patience of the Divine Other, who has endured the constant attempts of individuals and collectivities to domesticate the All-Powerful. God cannot be imagined by human beings in such a way that the fullness of the mystery of the Wholly Other is captured. What is expressed in the images of God of a particular people are aspects of the God mystery, the aspects that are important to them. Perhaps we could say that the answer to the question "Who and what is God?" is to be found somewhere in the combination of all the imagining of God by human beings from the beginning to the end of time. God is all that — and more.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the way in which the Divine was imagined in Ireland from the 1st to the 8th century A.D.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the way in which the Divine was imagined in Ireland from the 1st to the 8th century A.D. What is significant about this era is that the ancient Celtic religion gave way to Christianity and the image of God changed as a result. My thesis is that early Celtic Christianity had a richness that was expressed in a broad image of God based on the assimilation of Christianity into Celtic religious consciousness. As time went on, the Church in Ireland came under Roman influence and control, and the image of God became more limited.

Any serious attempt to explore the imagination of pre-Christian and early Christian Ireland must pay particular attention to the matter of the reliability of the sources. Unfortunately, there are numerous problems with the sources. Nothing was written down by the Irish until the seventh century. When it was written, it was by Christian monks whose aim was to claim the superiority of the Christian God, and saints of the Christian faith over the ancient religion. The earliest literary sources, therefore, are hagiographical. Archeology has not yet helped to clarify the situation. One of the main problems for archeologists is the fact that most of the holy places of pre-Christian ritual and

worship were appropriated by Christianity. Churches and monasteries were built on sacred sites, and, as with so much else in this exploration of Celtic and early Christian Ireland, remains of original sites were almost obliterated.

The primary sources are so sparse that contradictory conclusions have been drawn by various scholars. Some interpretations present Celtic Ireland as an idyllic world, where men and women had equal rights, where hospitality, even towards enemies, was normative and where people only went to war when dialogue and discussion were absolutely exhausted.² Others assert that pre-Christian Irish society was barbaric in the worst sense of the word and that war and the warrior class were glorified above all else. The warring Celts held as their most prized treasures the severed heads of enemies which were paraded as trophies. They abused women as a matter of course and upheld a system of patriarchal dominance so extreme that the Roman Christian Church was readily embraced by women because it was seen as liberation from the oppressive status quo.³ The bottom line is that we just cannot know which version is true or if the truth lies somewhere between the two.

In this study I used this question as an interpretive tool to build my argument: "Does what the author is saying sit comfortably side by side with the local traditions, folklore, speech and superstition of my people?" This may not be the most scholarly way to authenticate sources but it is at least very Celtic!

Proinsias MacCana has ascribed the unity of the ancient people known as the Celts to their culture rather than to race. They had sprung from various ethnic origins but their language, nomenclature, social and political institutions, and way of life were distinctive. By the fourth century B.C. they dominated northern Europe and they had begun to move southward. By 300 B.C. they had established themselves in Spain, Italy, and Greece as well as in Asia Minor. Their reign was short-lived, however, because "the Celtic peoples lacked the sense of cohesion and the flair for centralized organization that could have consolidated this scattering of tribes into a commonwealth."⁴

Under pressure from the Germans in the north, the Dacians in the east and the Romans in the south, Celtic influence receded quickly and by the first century, when the Roman Empire extended to Britain the Celtic tribal lifestyle survived only along that country's western seaboard. It also survived, and indeed thrived, further west, on the island of Ireland, an island which the Romans considered too insignificant to bother with.⁵

Celtic Ireland remained more or less undisturbed by

outside influence until the introduction of Christianity in the fifth century. Society was tribal and the tribe was called the *tuath*, a word which was used to denote the people of the tribe and the land it owned interchangeably. The *tuath* was stratified into three basic classes: king and royal kin, nobles, and free commoners. There were also various classes of servants and slaves but these were regarded as property rather than as members of the *tuath*. The druids, poets/seers, bards, brehons (interpreters of the law), warriors and blacksmiths were all drawn from the nobility and the free commoners filled the lesser roles of herdsmen, carpenters, tailors, etc. The land was owned in common and farming activity was generally pastoral rather than agricultural.⁶

The religious life of the pre-Christian Celts was a strange combination of complexity and simplicity.

Mackey describes pre-Christian Irish society as "non-literate" as distinct from "illiterate", the difference being that it was not unlearned but rather that there was "a positive preference for memory retention and oral transmission".⁸ The druids, the poets/seers, the bards and the brehons were the conservers of the vast body of tradition and law that was committed to memory and handed down from generation to generation. Irish folklore tells us that this learned class spent anywhere from seven to twenty years studying in specialized schools. The children of nobles received their education through the peculiar Celtic arrangement of fosterage. By this arrangement they spent their childhood and adolescence in the homes of one, or a number, of the people of the learned class who formed them in preparation for their role in adult society.⁸

The religious life of the pre-Christian Celts was a strange combination of complexity and simplicity. They worshiped a variety of deities bound together in a tangled web of relationships which are characterized by a lack of logical consistency. A goddess, for example, can appear in different stories as the mother, mate and daughter of the same god. There is little possibility of untangling the web. Paradoxically the reason for the complexity is a beautifully simple regard for the notion of mystery and for the incomprehensibility of things spiritual. In the Celtic mind the spirit world was not expected to be logical. There was no attempt to understand it because it was simply beyond the understanding of human beings. At the same time the relationship between this world and the spirit world was perceived as being much closer in Celtic Ireland than it is in modern Christian consciousness.

The Celtic mind acknowledged no real dichotomy between reality and fantasy, between this world and the world "beyond". The doors of perception stood perpetually ajar and all people were open to visionary states.....The concept of divine power diffused through all nature forms the basis of the ancient religion of the Celts....Unlike the Hebrews, the Celts had no notion of a God who was "wholly other" nor of the human as something radically different to the rest of the natural world. Consequently there was no linear, discursive history per se, everything was conceptualized metaphorically.⁹

There is no creation story in Celtic mythology. The land and the natural world were always there. There are, however, stories of various invasions of Ireland by mythological tribes which some scholars say may represent the waves of Celtic settlers who arrived in Ireland, complete with their gods and goddesses, between 500 and 100 B.C.¹⁰ The mythological tradition recognizes the triad of mother goddesses *Eriu*, *Banba* and *Fodhla* as the first inhabitants of Ireland. Their names are the three ancient names for Ireland and their place at the start of Irish mythology explains the tradition of identifying the land with a goddess. It is interesting to note that the seventh century Christian monks who recorded the story of *Eriu*, *Banba* and *Fodhla* rendered them more palatable to the Christian tradition by claiming that they were the daughters of Cain.¹¹ There were six mythological invasions in all and in the last, and most significant one, the *Tuatha De Danann* (The Tribe of the Goddess Dana) was crushed and retreated underground. The story of the invasions would seem to have as its aim the legitimization of the *Tuatha De Danann* as the gods of the people of pre-Christian Ireland. The *Tuatha De Danann* lived in the earth and gave their names to rivers, lakes, and areas of land. They also formed mounds which became sacred sites for ritual and worship. It is very likely that the mounds in question were actually formed by ancient inhabitants of Ireland of which little is known. However, it is easy to see how unexplained natural phenomena were attributed to the gods.

The various characters of the *Tuatha De Danann* had specific roles as blacksmiths, poets etc., which mirrored the roles in tribal Celtic society. Many of them visited this world regularly and great heroes from this world, who were also mythological figures but not gods, were brought into their world to resolve disputes among them. Irish mythology never places good against evil as polar opposites. None of the mythological figures is presented as being perfect and there are many tales of petty squabbling and jealousy among the *Tuatha De Danann*. Their leader *The Daghdha*, whose name means "The Good God," was renowned for his generosity. Ironically though, this great leader is often presented as a comic figure in the mythological tales.

The Daghdha provides a striking instance of the ancient tendency to treat gods and father figures as objects of fun and ridicule. Though short garments were the mark of the churl and the vagabond entertainer the Daghdha's tunic barely reached as far as his rump. And if his dress was uncouth, his behavior at times was even more so.....[P]aradoxical as it may appear it is by virtue of his seniority that he is made a figure of fun.¹²

Among the goddesses there seem to be two categories. Earth/Mother goddesses such as *Dana* and *Boann* feature little in the stories and they are certainly never ridiculed. From the literary evidence they would appear to be different from goddesses such as *Morrigan*, the goddess of war and the triple goddess *Macha* who feature in stories, much like the male deities, as being almost human. They make mistakes, they are tricked by other characters and they are subjected to a certain amount of ridicule. There are at least two theories which could explain the existence of the two categories of goddess. The first is that it is possible that the Earth/Mother goddesses belong to an early mythological cycle which became displaced by the later *Tuatha De Dannann* tradition and that the earlier stories had simply been forgotten by the time the Christian monks began to record the folk tales. It is impossible however to say whether there is any definite chronology in the development of the various images of the divine and it is difficult to see why the Earth/Mother goddesses feature in the records at all if they were not prominent in popular tradition. The second theory is the one put forward by Mary Condren. She claims that the Earth/Mother goddesses were conveniently "forgotten" by the Christian monks who recorded the stories because they were totally unacceptable to the Christian tradition.¹³ It does seem fairly likely that the monks were more comfortable with the stories of the almost "human" *Tuatha De Danann*, who did not threaten the Christian image of God in any way, than they were with the powerful female expression of the divine embodied in the Celtic Earth/Mother goddesses. That the stories tell little or nothing about the goddess *Dana*, to whom the *Tuatha De Danann* were dedicated, certainly does seem extraordinary but while Christian hagiography may have succeeded in virtually eliminating *Dana* it had far more difficulty with *Brigid*, who featured so prominently in popular devotion that she could not be ignored. The Christian monks of the seventh and eighth centuries found a very pragmatic solution to the problem of *Brigid*. With what could only be described as a miracle they rehabilitated this Earth/Mother goddess and transformed her into a Christian saint.

The goddess of poetry, healing and the metal arts thus became the Christian patroness of learning, healing and the domestic arts. Because the celibate monks could not transfer the strong sexu-

al/maternal qualities of the Celtic Brigid to her Christian counterpart they virginized her, identified her with the "Mother of Christ" and hailed her as "Protectress of Ireland".¹⁴

The ritual year of the pre-Christian people gives an indication of their devotion to the various deities and also the very strong connection between that devotion and everyday life in tribal, pastoral, Celtic society. The first Celtic festival of our calendar year was the festival of *Imbolc* which was dedicated to *Brigid*. This took place on February first (which is now St. Brigid's Day) and celebrated the beginning of the lambing season and the coming into milk of the ewes. The second festival was *Beltaine*, which was celebrated on May 1st. It was the great spring/summer festival of fertility and was marked by the lighting of fires in honor of various local gods of light and fertility. The month long festival of *Lughnasa* took place in July and August and it was a harvesting festival. The festival is called after the god *Lugh Lamh Fhada* (Lugh of the Long Arm), who is believed to be a late addition to the Irish community of gods brought in by a first century B.C. group of Celtic settlers who may have been responsible for introducing some agricultural activity. The stories which surround the festival tell how *Lugh* inaugurated it in honor of the goddesses. Each area honored its own goddess and had its own particular story of why *Lugh* wished her to be honored. It is very likely that this festival has a tradition going back much further than the arrival of *Lugh* on the scene and that it had always been associated with the goddesses.¹⁵

A number of official missionaries, among them a bishop called Patrick, were sent to Ireland from the British church . . .

Imbolc, Beltaine and Lughnasa are still celebrated in parts of Ireland today with practices such as the lighting of bonfires, the gathering of certain plants and flowers which are hung up to ward off evil, and the making of Brigid's crosses.¹⁶ However it is the festival of *Samhain*, which took place on November first, that is the most well known of the Celtic festivals today as it is in this festival that our Halloween has its origins. In the Celtic world *Samhain* marked the end of one year and the beginning of the next. It was a time when the other world became visible and when there was great interaction between the human world and the spirit world. Most of the mythological events recounted in the folk-tales took place at *Samhain* and it was also the time when kings were inaugurated and mated

with the goddess of their *tuath*. The tradition held that, if the new king was the right one, the land and the people would prosper as a sign that the goddess was pleased. If, on the other hand, the king did not rule wisely and justly, the unhappiness of the goddess would become apparent in failed crops barren animals and a plethora of natural disasters.¹⁷

It is probable that, towards the end of the fourth century, Christianity had been introduced to Ireland as a result of the interaction between Irish traders and Christians in Britain and Gaul. A number of official missionaries, among them a bishop called Patrick, were sent to Ireland from the British church in the fifth century and, by the end of the sixth century, it would appear that the majority of the Irish people had become Christian. The ancient religion however had not been eradicated but had been assimilated into the new religion to form Celtic Christianity. In terms of organization that assimilation was expressed in Celtic monasticism, which was an ecclesial adaptation of the Celtic tribal system. More to the point is the extent to which Celtic religious consciousness influenced the way in which God was imagined by the Celtic Christians. I will discuss two significant pieces of evidence — the Pelagian controversy and the prayer known as *St. Patrick's Breastplate* — which, I believe, prove the thesis with which I began, that early Celtic Christianity had a richness that was expressed in a broad image of God based on the assimilation of Christianity into Celtic consciousness.

Pelagius, because of his Celtic background, saw all of creation as being basically good.

The first piece of evidence, which has nothing to do with Ireland as such, is the controversy between the Celtic theologian Pelagius (who was probably British) and Augustine which took place in the fifth century. The issue in dispute was Pelagius' claim that human nature had a potential for sinlessness. He believed that a child was innocent at birth, having been created by a just and good God, and that it was through the freedom of individual human will that sin occurred rather than as a result of a fallen nature. What is significant is not the controversy itself but rather its implications with regard to the Celtic Christian image of God. Pelagius, because of his Celtic background, saw all of creation as being basically good. He acknowledged no matter/spirit, body/soul duality and he saw an essential harmony between all things created by God. For him, human beings were created good and, by balancing their potential, their will and their actions (*posse, velle*

and *esse*) they could give glory to God by maintaining the sinless harmony with which they were born. Pelagius did not claim that humans regularly managed to maintain their sinlessness but he did say that, in the ideal, it was possible. Augustine opposed his theology vehemently, claiming that it denied the importance of the grace of God by which our base human nature is redeemed.

One could speculate on how the history of the church and the development of theology, particularly in relation to sexuality and the role of women, might have been different had Pelagius' positive understanding of human nature prevailed over Augustine's insistence that we are base creatures. However, Pelagius was condemned and the church has lived with the legacy of Augustine ever since. Nicholson claims that the Celtic church, in both Britain and Ireland, remained "Pelagian" for centuries after he was condemned and that this was as a result of Celtic religious consciousness which had a very positive attitude to the natural world.¹⁸

The second piece of evidence speaks for itself and therefore I have chosen to let it do so. It is the prayer or hymn known as *St. Patrick's Breastplate* which, although it is attributed to Patrick himself, cannot be traced back further than the 8th century.¹⁹

For my shield this day I call:

*A mighty power:
The Holy Trinity!
Affirming threeness,
Confessing oneness,
In the making of all
Through love....*

For my shield this day I call:

*Christ's power in his coming
and in his baptising,
Christ's power in his dying
on the cross, his arising
from the tomb, his ascending;
Christ's power in his coming
for judgement and ending.*

For my shield this day I call:

*strong power of the seraphim,
with angels obeying,
and archangels attending,
in the glorious company
of the holy and risen ones,
in the prayers of the fathers,
in visions prophetic
and commands apostolic,
in the annals of witness,
in virginal innocence,
in the deeds of steadfast men.*

For my shield this day I call:

Heaven's might,

Sun's brightness,
Moon's whiteness,
Fire's glory,
Lightning's swiftness,
Wind's wildness,
Ocean's depth,
Earth's solidity,
Rock's immobility.

This day I call to me:

God's strength to direct me,
God's power to sustain me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's vision to light me,
God's ear to my hearing,
God's word to my speaking,
God's hand to uphold me,
God's pathway before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's legion to save me:
from snares of the demons,
from evil enticements,
from failings of nature,
from one man or many
that seek to destroy me,
anear or afar.

Around me I gather

those forces to save
my soul and my body
from dark powers that assail me:
against false prophesyings,
against pagan devisings,
against heretical lying
and false gods all around me.
Against spells cast by women
by blacksmiths, by Druids,
against knowledge unlawful
that injures the body,
that injures the spirit.

Be Christ this day my strong protector;

against poison and burning,
against drowning and wounding,
through reward wide and plenty....
Christ beside me, Christ before me;
Christ behind me, Christ within me;
Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
Christ to right of me, Christ to left of me;
Christ in my lying, my sitting, my rising;
Christ in heart of all who know me,
Christ on tongue of all who meet me,
Christ in eye of all who see me,
Christ in ear of all who hear me.

For my shield this day I call

A mighty power:
The Holy Trinity!

Affirming threeness,
Confessing oneness
In the making of all -
Through love.

*For to the Lord belongs salvation,
and to the Lord belongs salvation
and to Christ belongs salvation.*

*May your salvation, Lord, be
with us always.*

*(Domini est salus, Domini est salus,
Christi est salus;*

*Salus tua, Domine, sit semper nobiscum).*²⁰

St. Patrick's Breastplate which appears in the manuscripts in an early form of the Irish language, represents for me the marriage between Celtic religious consciousness and Christianity at its best. O'Donoghue's analysis of the prayer highlights its interesting Celtic features. The opening invocation is to the Trinity rather than to the Father, Son and Spirit, the formula which now dominates our way of calling on the Deity. The Christ, rather than the Father is invoked next, illustrating a deep understanding of the fact that Jesus Christ was the special sign and action of God in human history. Indeed, it must be noted that the word "Father" is not used at all in the prayer. Heaven and earth, the spirit world and the material world, are joined in a unique way in the third stanza and the power of angels, saints, church fathers, visions, words, and deeds of faithful Christians are called on, in one breath. The fourth stanza, which is often left out when the prayer is included in modern hymnals, appeals to the Divine as a cosmic power. The next two verses raise the concerns of Celtic Christians with regard to the snares of the demonic powers and they point to a particular fear of pre-Christian culture which obviously perdured when the prayer was composed. The Christ is invoked once more in the seventh stanza and here there is an emphasis on the importance of human relationships which is often absent from the later prayer tradition. "There is no privatism here...but rather radiance and connectedness and a deep holy respect for all human relationships."²¹ The prayer concludes with a repeat of the appeal for the protection of the Trinity, followed by the first words addressed directly to God and a traditional Latin "Amen."

Having considered the Pelagian controversy and *St. Patrick's Breastplate* a number of questions need to be asked. What happened? How did this wonderfully broad eighth century image of a cosmic God become the narrow, austere and judgmental Father of twentieth century Irish Catholicism? What terrible forces contrived to transform the positive Celtic understanding of the natural world and a gracious God into a modern Irish Catholic consciousness which has an inordinate sense of the body/soul dichotomy and which believes

that we must continually strive to make restitution to the Father because our sins, particularly our sexual sins, render us totally unworthy of His love? How has our ancestors' expression of the Divine Mystery in the wholesome, powerful and vibrant Earth/Mother goddesses such as *Dana*, *Boann* and *Brigid* been so completely eclipsed by the Patriarch of Irish Catholicism? It is not possible to deal with these questions in any depth in this essay. The best I can do is give a brief outline of the history in which the answers may lie hidden.

From the ninth century onwards there was much interaction between the Irish church and the church in Europe.

In the eighth century there was a reform movement in the Irish church which had as its aim the elimination of abuses in Celtic monasticism. The reforming monks opted for a particularly ascetic approach to the Christian life. It was out of this movement that the Irish penitentials, the missionary outreaches to continental Europe and Ireland's reputation as the island of saints and scholars grew. From the ninth century onwards there was much interaction between the Irish church and the church in Europe. Irregularities in the practices of the Celtic church with regard to the dating of Easter and the correct tonsure for monks were fought and lost by the Irish church and it came more and more under Roman influence. The Norman invasion of Ireland from Britain was sanctioned by the pope, and the Irish bishops were among the first to swear allegiance to the Norman king. After the Reformation, when Britain became Protestant, the Irish Catholic church was subjected to centuries of persecution. As the Roman church was seen as the only champion of an oppressed people, the Irish church seemingly became more Roman than the Vatican itself! During the centuries of persecution, Irish seminarians were educated in Europe and they were influenced to a great extent by the Jansenist movement. Somehow all of these developments and events combined to transform the Celtic image of God radically.

However, there is a powerful residue of Celtic religious consciousness in the people of Ireland. In the speech of the ordinary people, particularly in the Irish language, the distance between this world and the spirit world is virtually non-existent. The Irish version of "Hello" is "*Dia dhuit*" which means "God be with you". There is no greeting which does not mention

God. The Irish language even has a form of the verb known as *An Fhoirm Ghui* (The Prayer Form), in which the English "may" is incorporated into the verb for everyday greetings and blessings as in "*Go raibh rath De ort*" (May the blessing of God be on you), an Irish version of "Thank you".

In every parish, town, and village there are people who have "cures" for ailments such as ringworm and shingles. I have been present while old men and women have "given the cure" by reciting strange litanies over the afflicted person. These litanies appeal to Christian saints and to the sun, moon, stars and sea, at one and the same time.

In Ireland the strange mounds of earth which are believed to have been occupied by the people of the other world in former times still remain largely undisturbed by farmers and developers because of local superstition. Holy wells, most of which are now given Christian significance, are also afforded reverence by ordinary people and are often considered by them to be far more important than their parish church. It is difficult to explain the popular reverence for such places and I am inclined to believe that it is rooted in the fact that Irish religious consciousness is still trying desperately to connect our Christian present with our Celtic past.

The Irish, as we have seen, have had many gods, or at least have expressed their image of God in many ways. We live in a time when consumer capitalism is attempting to forge a world culture, to teach a common language and to provide images to which all the peoples of the world can relate. The aim of course is that people will spend more money and acquire more material things in the name of the god of profit. In this essay I have attempted to reclaim my own heritage of gods, symbols and religious images, in the hope that they can begin to speak powerfully once more, if not to all people, at least to my own. The Irish have an extraordinarily rich religious heritage which can, I believe, provide images of God for us that are liberating and that have tremendous possibilities for allowing God to be a cosmic God, unlimited by gender and human logic. In pre-Christian Ireland the Divine Mystery was truly accepted as mystery and yet there was a real closeness between this world and the world of the spirit. The Irish literary tradition has, more than anything else kept the expression of the paradoxical complexity and simplicity of Celtic religious consciousness alive. Therefore, I give the last word to Patrick Kavanagh, an ordinary Irish Christian Celt, who walked by a canal in Dublin one afternoon.

Leavy with love banks and the green waters of the canal

*Pouring redemption for me, that I do
The will of God, wallow in the habitual, the banal,
Grow with nature as before I grew.
The bright stick trapped, the breeze adding a third*

Party to the couple kissing on an old seat,
 And a bird gathering material for a nest the Word
 Eloquently new and abandoned to its delirious beat.
 O unworn world enrapture me, encapture me in a web
 Of fabulous grass and eternal voices by a beech,
 Feed the gaping need of my senses, give me ad lib
 To pray unselfconsciously with overflowing speech
 For this soul needs to be honored with a new dress
 woven
 From green and blue things and arguments that cannot
 be proven.²²

Footnotes

1. I have borrowed the notion of "hearing silky footsteps" from the poem "The Fairy Thorn" by Samuel Ferguson. The poem tells the story of three young girls who, dancing around a forbidden fairy tree, become conscious of the presence of people from the Other World.
 "They hear the silky footsteps of the silent fairy crowd,
 Like a river in the air gliding round."
2. For a positive description of Celtic Ireland see Schmiel, Mary Aileen, "The Finest Music in the World: Exploring Celtic Spiritual Legacies," in *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes* edited by Fox, Matthew, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Co. Inc., 1981) pp. 164- 189.
3. Mary Condren presents this view of Celtic Ireland in *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).
4. MacCana, Proinsias *Celtic Mythology*. (London: Hamlyn, 1970), p. 12.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

6. Powell, T.G.E. *The Celts*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980) pp. 61-142.
7. Mackey, James P. "Is there a Celtic Christianity?" in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*. Ed. by Mackey, James P. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 3.
8. For more information on life in Celtic society see Ross, Anne, *Everyday life of the Pagan Celts*. (London: B.T.Batsford Ltd., 1970)
9. Schmiel, Mary Aileen, p. 170.
10. See MacCana, Proinsias, chapters 1 and 3.
11. See Campbell, Joseph, *Occidental Mythology: The Masks of God*. (Penguin Books, 1964), p. 299.
12. MacCana, Proinsias, p. 66.
13. Condren, Mary, p. 29.
14. O Cathasaigh, Donal, "The Cult of Brigid", in *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*. Ed. by Preston, James L. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 92.
15. Powell, pp. 144-150.
16. The St. Brigid's "crosses" which good Catholics make diligently on February first each year are actually a pre-Christian symbol for the sun. See Mary Condren, p. 66.
17. Ross, Anne, pp. 114-123.
18. See Nicholson, M. Forthomme, "Celtic Theology: Pelagius" in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, pp. 386-413.
19. O'Donoghue, N.D. "St Patrick's Breastplate", *Ibid.*, p. 45.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-49.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
22. "Canal Bank Walk" by Patrick Kavanagh (1904 -1967). *A Treasury of Irish Verse*. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), p. 106.

Mercy International Center — Dublin 1994

The Burlingame Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy cordially invites all Sisters, Associates and Friends of Mercy to join them in an Institute wide pilgrimage to Dublin to celebrate the dedication of Mercy International Centre on July 23, 1994.

Discounted airfare from points throughout the Institute, well located, comfortable, bargain priced accommodations in Dublin, a choice of a seven-day guided coach tour or seven-day rental car/van farmhouse package are among some of the options this trip will offer.

Please watch your regional newsletters for more information regarding this pilgrimage. Sister Joan Marie O'Donnell and Associate Marian Monks, both of the Burlingame Regional Community, are working together to make this trip a grand success!

Confidence in God

Ann Marie Caron, RSM

Catherine McAuley began the last and probably the most astonishing phase of her career in 1835. She was fifty-four years old at the time. In the course of the next seven years (1835-1841) Catherine established eleven new foundations and laid plans for others which were begun after her death. There is a marked continuity of gospel response throughout the whole of Catherine's adult years. Here I want to focus on this final phase and her confidence in God Provident as she risked new ventures. Through all she encouraged and supported her companions in seeking the same confidence and vision. Taking up the image of the dance, Catherine had reflected: "I think sometimes our passage through this dear sweet world is something like the dance called "Right and Left," Her description brings out several movements, such as cross-over, changed places, curtsie, bow, and change corners. In these seven years Catherine changed places as she traveled across Ireland and back to Dublin. Her gospel response toward new foundations also brought her to Birr, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Bermondsey. She crossed over and back, returning once more to the foundations in Ireland. Through all she relied on God. "We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back."

**"...an impulse lies deep within
us to hand on to our daughters
and sons the treasury of
living which the dance of the
spirit proves to be..."**

In a recent work³ the metaphor of dance was used to suggest the movements in women's spirituality. Taking up this metaphor I suggest that in Catherine's extant letters to her sisters, letters which span the years 1827-1841, we see Catherine as she danced the steps Maria Harris names traditioning and transforming. By traditioning Harris understands that "...an impulse lies deep within us to hand on to our daughters and sons the treasury of living which the dance of the spirit proves to be. ... Traditioning claims us in the dance as essential to Spirituality, a step having to do with the ways those coming after us are educated into their own spirituality." Harris intuitively understands that "the future's risks as well as its possibilities are so great that we are impelled beyond ourselves and our families to a spirituality that cares for the universe."⁴

In her foundation letters we witness Catherine living with her heart held fast by confidence in God. The ordinary life in mission provided the opportunity for formation and deeper growth for her companions in their own apostolic spirituality. Thus Catherine's dance Partner may well be named God provident. We read in her letters how central confident trust in a provident God was to her and to the Institute of Mercy founded in 1831. Carmel Bourke identified this virtue of confidence in God's providence as the principle of Catherine's apostolic spirituality. "If we do not recognize that characteristic in Catherine McAuley," Bourke challenges us, "we do not understand her."⁵ Catherine's confident and joyful response to a provident God was formed, nurtured, challenged, and traditioned in the cultural, historical, and religious matrix of Ireland in the late eighteenth-to mid-nineteenth century Dublin. Our moment of history likewise influences our spirituality informed by theology.

THE STATE OF THE QUESTION: THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE ON PROVIDENCE

People claim we no longer have a spirituality and doctrine of divine providence. Others believe we need to re-claim and to re-construct a theology of providence. Why the need? First, without a theology of divine providence the idea of God is largely irrelevant to what is going on in the world. Second, the view one holds about the nature of God provident affects the Christian approach to prayer and action,⁶ that is apostolic spirituality. Historically there was a tendency to restrict both a spirituality and a theology of providence, which emphasized a supernatural, static, and privatized God. More importantly, the misuse of this theology, especially in its view of God's will, became a tool for the oppression of peoples rather than an impetus for justice and liberation.⁷ The signs of the times invite us to re-consider this theology.

The implications of this issue can be further illustrated in three responses to circumstances: resignation, accommodation, and liberation. Each response reflects a relationship of God to the world, the central concern of the doctrine of divine Providence. Resignation assumes a God who is not directly involved in human history, but calls one to transcend history and to prepare for happiness in eternal life. Accommodation requires an internalization of a portrait of God who has established the social economic order. In this view, one's status in life is preordained and is to be accepted without any attempt to alter one's human condition. Liberation acts on the belief that God is concerned about those under the bondage of oppression and strengthens them to struggle against oppression. They are confident that God will aid them to be successful.

Responses one (resignation) and two (accommodation) reflect the emphasis of a classical model of theology. This model is well-known. Its central theme was God's sovereignty. Emphasis was placed on God's power as control of our lives and our world. Obedience to God's will, mediated through the institutions of church and society, was a central aspect of this spirituality. Grace enabled one to accept given situations and structures, for these were seen as ordained by God. In this model more emphasis was given to God's power as control-over than to God's love and concern. God's plan was understood as an unchanging blueprint; God's design for creation as decree.

Response three (liberation) represents a contemporary model.⁸ This model is informed by a New Testament understanding of the praxis of Jesus. History and not the hereafter is seen as the locus of God's liberating presence, activity and lure. The themes of relationality and interdependence, empowerment, working with others, and persuasive rather than coercive power take on new theological significance. Human responsibility becomes more important in relation to a biblical understanding of God as vulnerable, responsive, and dependent on human action in history. Such a theological perspective considers God as suffering in the suffering of Jesus and in our suffering. In this model prayer is seen as the deepest source of providential guidance for our decision-making. It is a guidance which respects, is responsive to, and dependent on human creativity.

We might want to reflect on our own experience of a provident God and notice which of these models of God seems to be operative in our lives and ministries. We can look again at this central theme of confidence in God in Catherine's letters as an invitation to see our times with new eyes.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION — CATHERINE'S LETTERS

Providence as sustenance and governance is a notion common to every age. When we bring the discussion of a theology of providence into dialogue with spirituality, then providence, as Barbara Doherty reminds us, "is that name of God which brings the motions of human existence into meaning."⁹ The word, "meaning," as used here implies God's gracious power revealing the purpose of existence and humanity's evolving insights in assessing that purpose. I want, then, to call attention to three of the nuances of providence that can be discerned in the extant letters. They are Catherine's confidence in God as faithful provider, as just guide who orders rightly, and her confidence in accepting God's known will.

Confidence in God: Faithful Provider

Incidents in the story of the new foundations, as seen in selected letters, indicate there were ample reasons for Catherine to encourage her companions to

have trust and confidence in God. Tullamore (April 1836) was the first foundation of the Institute she risked outside Dublin. With trust in God to carry on the work with the poor, Catherine would not allow insufficient funds to weaken her resolve.

In 1841, when Catherine initiated another new foundation she still had little funds to bear the heavy expenses. She thought back to the early days in Tullamore. She found strength and comfort in the thought that only four years before, the Tullamore community had begun their work in "a little house whose rooms were so small that a cat could hardly dance in any one of them. A kindly Providence had watched over that first foundation outside of Dublin."¹⁰ Generous benefactors had supported this project of work among the poor. Within the first month Catherine welcomed two postulants. Both women had previously served the poor in Tullamore with Miss Pentony.

**"Ah! sure it was
the Lord who drove you in
amongst us."**

Again in 1836 a Miss Clanchy offered one of her houses and a sum of five hundred pounds toward a new foundation in Charleville¹¹ in north-west of County Cork. Catherine, it seems, considered Miss Clanchy's money sufficient to make a start, though inadequate to support the community. This did not, however hold back her response. She would trust in God's providence. A steady flow of postulants into Baggot Street, in her judgment, ensured that the community, overworked though it was, could send some members to form a nucleus for Charleville.

The house in Charleville was small and damp, not really furnished for their needs, and quite a distance from the local school. That Charleville remained in Catherine's thoughts is evidenced in her words: "I often lay out plans for it, please God, they will succeed. It has hitherto been a sick branch, but it will be a strong one yet."¹² An old woman of Charleville is said to have remarked: "Ah! sure it was the Lord who drove you in amongst us." The townsfolk saw the "ladies from Dublin" going in and out of the cabins of the poor and soon were filled with reverence and admiration for the "moving nuns."¹³

Nevertheless, many serious problems plagued this mission, a source of great anxiety to Catherine.¹⁴ She would not be tempted to abandon this foundation despite the difficult first years. "What could excuse us before God for casting off any charge which we had freely undertaken, except compelled by necessity to do so? Are not the poor of Charleville as dear to Him as

elsewhere? And while one pound of Miss Clanchy's five hundred lasts, ought we not to persevere and confide in His providence? Put your whole confidence in God. He will never let you want necessities for yourself or children."¹⁵

In the foundation at Kingston, as in the beginning of other foundations, Catherine sought counsel before undertaking any new venture. Benefactors were sought to provide the necessary funds. The circumstances surrounding the Kingston foundation attest to Catherine's solicitous care for her sisters and for the poor. The impetus for this foundation was Catherine's desire to safeguard the health of her community.¹⁶ Her companions were suffering from sickness, others were of delicate health or overworked. Toward this goal Catherine selected this site and limited the works of Mercy to visitation of the sick poor in the neighborhood.

I would rather be cold and hungry than (that) the poor in Kingston or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford.

When she visited Kingston on several occasions she was alert to the needs of the local girls. She would meet them loitering along the roads in a most neglected state.¹⁷ Her response was to plan for a school. As it happened neither Catherine nor the parish priest had sufficient money to carry out the project. Yet Catherine was ready to address the need. She offered to give the coach house, stable, and part of her garden as a site for the proposed school. Ultimately, the burden of debt and misunderstanding regarding responsibility for it turned this successful school into a very difficult and untenable situation.

In a letter to M. Francis Warde Catherine confirmed: "There [Kingston] also we find a nice little Cross - Law proceedings for building the school, though we expressly said we could not contribute more than the ground, coach house and fifty pounds from the Bazaar. By giving that £50 Mr. Sheridan [Parish Priest] says I am what he terms 'committed'... I am hiding from some law persons who wants to serve a paper on me personally ... I am afraid to remain five minutes in the small parlour. This has more cause for laughing than for crying, you may be sure, for every man is suspected of being the process man..."¹⁸ She was very clear that she would withdraw from the community if that was what was required.

A few weeks later Catherine acknowledged: "We have done all that justice and prudence demand to

avert this affliction. If it must come, let us receive it as the holy will of God in our regard." She offered consolation and advice to M. Teresa White:

*"Do not be afflicted for your poor: their heavenly Father will provide comfort for them, and you will have the same opportunity of fulfilling your obligations during your life. I charge you, my very dear child, not to be sorrowful but rather to rejoice if we are to suffer this humiliating trial. God will not be angry; be assured to that. And is not that enough."*¹⁹

Catherine, herself in deep pain over this unfortunate, humiliating situation, was strengthened by her trust that God would provide. Like the woman in the gospel, she sees that in this case, she has done all that she could do. "[God] knows," Catherine wrote, "I would rather be cold and hungry than (that) the poor in Kingston or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford. But in the present case we have done all that belonged to us to do; and even more than the circumstances justified. May God in his mercy bless and protect you all ..." ²⁰

She experienced the Kingston difficulties as "a real portion of the Cross."²¹ Through it all she had the support of M. Teresa White and the sisters.²² Peace flowed from knowing she did all that was possible. Her love of God and trust in providence were clearly marked in these letters. So, too, were her care and love for her companions and the poor. In November, 1838, the sisters left Kingston. They returned eighteen months later, in April, 1840, at the personal request of Dr. Murray.²³

The Cross, in one form or another, commented Sister Angela Bolster,²⁴ was so interwoven with Catherine McAuley's entire life that her sense of identification with the humbled, abandoned, agonizing Christ, "my Christ," dates from her teens. A spirituality of providence enables a person to understand becoming whole in brokenness and to perceive design in utter chaos.²⁵ Through personal experience of the Cross, a symbolic bearer of God's will, Catherine had become increasingly aware of the central place which compassion holds in the mystery of salvation. Her biographers comment, "The cross was the bridging reality linking the suffering of the poor to the promise of mercy and the newness of life."²⁶

Seasons of Sorrow

The sad news of the death of sisters as well as priests associated with the community came from Charleville, Carlow, Tullamore, Bermondsey, and all areas of the Institute. In a letter to Francis Warde, Catherine admitted: "... Most melancholy are these protracted maladies — six fevers would be preferable, in my opinion. They have a similar case in Cork. I did hope that God would have spared you all these severe trials for a longer time, but his Holy Will be done in all things — may He never leave the choice to us. We

can never be unhappy while we love and serve him faithfully.”²⁷

When Ellen Potter, the “sweet little poet” was dying, Catherine wrote to Elizabeth Moore in Limerick: “No words could describe what I felt on reading the first line of your letter.”²⁸ Catherine’s own words of advice, reflected perhaps what she had been praying in her own heart. “God will support you in this great affliction. His holy will be done. If he calls her away, it will be to shield her from some impending evil, or to exercise your patience.” In and through all Catherine believed, “some grand motive must actuate all His visitations.”

After word came of Ellen’s passing, Catherine wrote again to comfort Elizabeth Moore. She expressed the faith and resignation that supported her in sorrow. For Catherine, too, had been very fond of Sister Potter. “I did not think,” she wrote,

*“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 — this had not been done in anger — some joyful circumstance will soon prove that God is watching over your concerns, which are his own. But without the Cross the real Crown cannot come. Some great thing, which He designs to accomplish would have been too much without a little bitterness in the cup. Bless and love the Fatherly hand, which has hurt you. He will soon come with both hands filled with favours and blessings.”*²⁹

This had been “a season of sorrows,” sorrow for the passing of loved ones; sorrow for the heartbreak of others who were left to mourn their loss.

Confidence in God: A Just Guide

The cross was ever part of God’s designs. “This is the way of God’s providence,” Catherine told Francis Xavier Warde concerning news of the deaths of sisters in the new foundation in Bermondsey, London.³⁰ “I suppose all will go on well,” she continued, “to show us that what we think a drawback will be followed by greater progress. If they should have a new foundation, it will not be without the cross.” Catherine seems to have interpreted this affliction as a sure sign that God was with them and that God would continue to bless her Institute. By severe and constant pruning, she believed, God would make them ever stronger and more fruitful.³¹ On another occasion she encouraged Francis Xavier Warde: “This is your life: joys and sorrow mingled, one succeeding the other. Let us not think of the means God has employed to convey to us a portion of the Holy Cross, being ever mindful that it came from himself.”³²

Providence is the principal part of the virtue of prudence.³³ The object of this virtue is the proper ordering of all things to their end or purpose as intended by God. Because everything is eternally in God, God immediately cares for them. This is the meaning

of providence in the classical sense. Catherine echoed this theology as evident in several of the situations already mentioned. It is also clear in her encouragement to be a faithful religious.

*“Be just and fear not,” she wrote in a letter to Sister Mary Ann Doyle, in Tullamore. “You are on the secure high road of the cross. Have the most strong and lively confidence that your convent will be firmly established for it certainly will. Be just and fear not. Acquit yourself with justice toward God, let no temporal consideration influence your words or actions when the duty of your state is in question. ...It is bestowing ourselves most freely and relying with unhesitating confidence on the providence of God.”*³⁴

From the first dream for a House of Mercy on Baggot Street Catherine had entrusted the Institute to God’s loving care. She was confident in God’s guidance, yet she demonstrated prudence in her concern and wise planning. Questions over dowry, also indicate something of her vision and trust. For instance, when the Bishop of Meath hesitated over questions of dowry, and Mary Anne finally obtained his permission to accept a postulant with insufficient dowry, Catherine wrote: “I congratulate you on the happy increase which you and I love so much that we will never frighten a candidate away for not having a bag of money. We will sooner give half our share than not multiply. The Lord and Master of our House and Home is a faithful provider. Let us never desire more than enough. He will give that and a blessing.”³⁵ It seems it was a question of difference over dowry that provoked John Murphy, Bishop of Cork, to nickname Catherine “Sister of Divine Providence.”³⁶

“... while we place all our confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our exertions.”

Catherine believed and advised her companions: “... while we place all our confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our exertions.”³⁷ The recognition, in faith, of the presence of divine governance, subtle yet certain, is what allows the articulation of meaning whether tentative or fairly determined. The determination of meaning leads to choice and decision, to abandonment and acceptance, and to courage and freedom. In an account of the growth and development of the congregation Catherine testified: “There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence, vigilance or judgment has not impeded; and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God. I could mark the circumstances

calculated to defeat it at once; but nothing, however injurious in itself, has done us any injury. This is all I could say."³⁸

Summary

Catherine's deep and loving faith enabled her to trust in the abiding presence of God and to risk prudently in face of economic hardship. She began new ventures and let them go when that was clearly the answer. Several related issues have been identified: the generous support of benefactors and clergy coupled with severe financial hardships; the readiness for ministry coupled with physical hardships, illnesses, even death; the increase of new members while sustaining the sorrows of loss, even the reality of maintaining the works of Mercy already undertaken in the foundations. In all we recognize in Catherine conviction and decision against odds, her stamina to hold out for what she believed essential, and a prudent readiness to venture and risk. It is in her negotiation of these human motions, these tensions, that we find the meaning of divine providence. She encouraged trust and confidence in God who would provide and guide. And she acknowledged the painful portion of the Cross.

A remarkable serenity and peace flowed from doing God's will.

A remarkable serenity and peace flowed from doing God's will. Acceptance of this will was marked with joy, prudence, justice, and abandonment to God's guidance. Catherine seemed to know this serenity and peace. Although a certain passivity prevailed in this, a classical view of Providence, Catherine in her letters also encouraged action. The ministry of mercy was to be carried out from "hearts centered on God", that is, a contemplative consciousness. Sin and sinfulness in the world are always a matter of uncentering God's purposes. A critical function of prayer³⁹ enables one to see prophetically, and to act prophetically. In a contemporary model of providence, prayer is seen as the deepest source of providential guidance, a guidance responsive to and dependent on human creativity. Catherine was sustained by such prayer.

Thus, something of Catherine's practical theology of Providence is evolutionary, dependent upon the given past. Whatever happened was part of God's pre-ordained plan. All could have confidence in God's power controlling human lives and the world. "Put your confidence and trust in God." Something of Catherine's practical theology of Providence is eschatological, opening out to God's future, a reign of justice and mercy.

The twin cords of intimate trust in God Provident and of compassionate service to the poor enabled her to be open to experience joy in suffering, peace in the Cross, prayer in action, action in prayer, and life as oblation and praise. In turn she encouraged others to the same vision. The secret of holiness, suggests Barbara Doherty "is a graced ability not to polarize reality but to embrace the whole as providence — all of it care and all of it governance."⁴⁰ In her dance with God provident Catherine encouraged her companions to an apostolic spirituality.

Today, as in Catherine McAuley's nineteenth-century Ireland, God is encountered in history as persuasive power, empowerment, and liberation. God is recognized in a profound way to be on the side of the poor, sick and ignorant. The reign of God is a matter of the world becoming more authentically human, "what you do the least of your sisters and brothers you do to me." (Matt. 25:45) Catherine had allowed her feet and the feet of her "walking nuns" to lead wherever the poor, hungry, sick, homeless or uneducated cried out. She encouraged her companions to walk the path of mercy with abiding confidence in God. We are invited to consider (and to re-claim if necessary) Catherine's confidence in God for our mission of Mercy. In so living our mercy spirituality we will continue to craft a contemporary theology of providence in a world ever becoming more authentically human.

Footnotes

1. Mary Ignatius Neumann, RSM, ed. *The Letters of Catherine McAuley*, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), pp. 272-273.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
3. See Maria Harris, *Dance of the Spirit. The Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1989). On p. xii, Harris states: "I propose that women's spirituality is a rhythmic series of movements, . . . as steps in a dance, where there is movement backward and forward, turn and return, bending and bowing, circling and spiraling, and no need to finish or move on to the next step, except in our own good time and God's."
4. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
5. Mary 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. 33.
6. See M.J. Langford, "Providence," in the *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds. (Westminster Press, 1983), p. 479.
7. Here I am dependent on the work of Jamie Phelps, OLP., "Providence and Histories" *African American Perspectives with Emphasis on the Perspective of Black Liberation Theology, Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Association of America* (1989), pp. 12-18, see esp. pp. 12, 13.
8. See Anne Carr, 'Not a Sparrow Falls': *On Providence and Responsibility in History*, CTSA 44/1989: pp. 19-38.
9. Barbara Doherty, S.P., "Providence," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. A Michael Glazier

Book. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 790.
See also Doherty, "A Spirituality Named Providence,"
CTSA, 44/1989:124-134.

10. See Savage, Roland, *Catherine McAuley, The First Sister of Mercy*, (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1949), p. 335.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

12. Savage, pp. 191, 192.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

14. See Neumann, p. 106.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 107; see also Bolster, M. Angela, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1827-1841*, (Cork and Ross: Sisters of Mercy, 1989), p. 45.

16. See Savage, p. 173 ff.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

18. Bolster, *Correspondence*, pp. 49-51, esp. p. 50.

19. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 71.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, (Letter to M. de Pazzi Delany), p. 71.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

23. See Savage, p. 180.

24. M. Angela Bolster, RSM, *Catherine McAuley, Venerable for Mercy*. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990), p. 106.

25. See Barbara Doherty, "Providence," p. 791.

26. Bolster, *Venerable for Mercy*, p. 106.

27. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 122.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 126.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

31. Savage, pp. 326, 327.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

33. See: St. Thomas Aquinas St. 2a2ae, 49.6 and ad 1.

34. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 241.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

36. See Savage, p. 335.

37. Bolster, *Correspondence*, p. 169.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

39. Monika Hellwig, *Christian Women in a Troubled World* (Paulist Press: 1985), pp. 35-37.

40. Barbara Doherty, "Providence," p. 791.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some places of graced "unable" that I can name in my own history, in the history of the community, and in the charism?
2. What has been my experience of the enhancing or the blocking of creativity as I have observed it and/or have sought to express it in my life of Mercy? How does my sense of the charism affect that?
3. What has been your experience of a provident God?
4. Does your image of God reflect a more classical model of providence or a more contemporary model?
5. From within her cultural and historical milieu, what other influences could have affected the way Catherine McAuley established the community?
6. From within our own cultural milieu, to what influences could we be more open which may help propel us into a lifestyle which is more responsive to the needs of our world?
7. What "echoes" of Celtic Christianity have you heard in your own life and in the lives of others?
8. Which strains of Celtic Christianity could you personally, or we collectively as "Church," benefit by developing more today?
9. Short of recommending a field trip to Ireland, after reading this article, what can you hear Catherine McAuley suggesting to us today?
10. After reflecting upon the dynamic of historical silence, what are some of the possible consequences flowing from a community's selective memories?
11. The tract *Cottage Controversy* presents Catherine as a woman keenly in touch with the historical and political realities of her time. In what ways could this document speak to Mercy life in contemporary society?
12. How does Hunt's study of Celtic Christian Religion expand your vision of the Irish church and its spirituality?
13. Has your image of God expanded or been affirmed by the naming of God in Celtic consciousness?

Catherine McAuley and the Grace of Unable

Marianne Heib, RSM

A sculpture, especially an abstract work of art that is three dimensional, has many ways of revealing its nature, mystery and potential to the observer. As the person encountering a particular piece, you may approach it, view it from a distance, walk around it, even touch it. What is especially important to notice is the way it utilizes space, the places of positive and negative presence, the emptiness and the fullness that define its form.

The time of day, the setting, the objects surrounding it, the color of the room or of the garden, the lighting; a myriad of tiny factors would influence what you were seeing when you saw this sculpture. If you had time to study the artist, the times in which it were fashioned, the properties of the material, the intent; all of this would also affect and enrich your seeing. However, if a friend or acquaintance had sent you a postcard, with a picture of one view of this sculpture, you still might be drawn to it even though there would be so many dimensions unavailable to you and therefore to your deepest appreciation of this work of art.

**... it was with great
trepidation that I had become
willing to put myself in
her (Catherine's) presence in a
reflective way, to pray
about her life and my life
in a retreat setting.**

Perhaps it was something like that with Catherine and me. She was this three dimensional work of art that I had received one dimensional glimpses of from postcards sent from distant places and other people's journeys. I was in possession of a portrait that had become familiar but which generated a sense of uneasiness in me. This sense of unease, complex yet real, rendered me a distanced onlooker when it came to the life of the foundress, and her influence upon me. As an artist, I had yet to quietly walk around this particular work of art on my own, and thus, relying on the portrait handed down, was faced instead with a style that did not yield multiple interpretations.

The literature and stories whose intent was to illumine the character and virtue of this heroic woman effected the opposite in me. The verbiage of superlatives cast shadows rather than light on a person who above all, hoped to enter life at its most human level.

A Sister of Mercy from the Diocese of Oklahoma in a 1922 treatise paints us this portrait. "Her whole demeanor was a reflection of the bright flame of charity that consumed her from childhood; her calm, dignified bearing, her tender blue eyes, her sweet smile, her naive manner were but the outcome of a soul occupied with God; never once do we find her serenity disturbed, even amidst the trials of domestic ties, or the strenuous duties of community life. A multitude of occupations never changed her temper or temperament.

"The cultivated and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the virtuous and the fallen, the devout and the careless all claimed her for their benefactor.

"No one applied to her in vain for sympathy or relief...everyone who was in distress came to her and for each one she had a different remedy. Often she deprived herself of articles of dress, of food, of comforts to relieve the necessities of her neighbors."

I could find in this and in other similar accounts no negative space, no shading which would allow for fullness. It was an icon that could not draw the viewer in, and could not communicate life into the space around it. That, at least in part, was the portrait that I took with me several years ago to a Mercy Charism Retreat: the image of that first Sister of Mercy, undaunted, tireless, capable of responding selflessly in all situations. Thus, it was with great trepidation that I had become willing to put myself in her presence in a reflective way, to pray about her life and my life in a retreat setting. I might encounter for myself Catherine's three-dimensionality, and risk knowing and being known. And I suspected that, should this meeting indeed happen, I most certainly would be found wanting in the sight of the foundress.

Arriving at retreat, I unpacked, opening my own and our communal mythology and placing them folded into the bottomless drawers and closets of the coming days. The echo of a history of our community documents and of Catherine's words accompanied me. Years of hearing about the relentless giving of the Sister of Mercy followed me, along with words attributed to Catherine like, "In heaven alone the Sister of Mercy should look for rest."²

On the third day of the retreat, which dealt with a variety of events and themes in the charism, Patricia Joseph Corkery, from Merion offered a reflection on Catherine at Baggot Street. She described a time prior to Catherine's novitiate when controversy existed over these women living together, doing good works, gathering for prayer, imitating conventual life and seemingly offering competition to established religious orders. We retreatants heard the story of the day the chapel at Baggot Street was blessed. The director con-

cluded this account with the observation that due to the controversy that raged around her, Catherine was unable to attend the ceremonies, and, the literature says, stayed in the house and prayed instead.

It was so striking to me to hear that in this instance, Catherine was unable to face a situation. That afternoon, in my own quiet prayer, the image of this woman and that scene came back. I found myself imaginatively wandering through the house at Baggot Street, finding Catherine who was alone in a darkened place. I was able to spend the time just sitting with her, being with her. The silence between us was rich with understanding. This "unable" was a place I understood and could share with her. As a younger person, in my reverie, I had tried trotting behind her, as she swooped into the hovels of the poor, tending every need, and I had returned from this imaginative journey crestfallen, inadequate and feeling alienated from her bountifulness. But in this darkness, in this circle of shared awareness of a moment that could not be overcome, here, we were for the first time in my experience, just sisters, and my presence could be full and entire to her reality. The God of Mercy surrounded us in yet another work of mercy.

During the course of the retreat, when the group gathered for reflection, I was able to share some of this prayer, and felt it open us up to the shadow side of ourselves and of the charism. I have used this example with people I work with both in retreats and in spiritual direction and they have in turn found comfort in it. Somehow it is a blessed relief for us to acknowledge and be with this "unable".

After retreat, I went to Catherine's story to read about this incident and see what else might be there for us in this place in her life when Catherine is overcome and experiences for us that place of unable. "In *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, the following brief passage reports. On June 4, 1929, the chapel was dedicated under the title of Our Lady of Mercy. The Archbishop presided, the Rev. Patrick Wood was celebrant and Dr. Michael Blake preached, eulogizing Miss McAuley who was not present, being indisposed because of mounting pressures."³

Mercy unto Thousands, gives us more of an emotional sense of the climate of the day in this account:

*"She was not present at the ceremonies to hear herself panegyricized by her unfailing ally, Dr. Blake. Something like consternation attends the reading of this passage from recollections of the day. 'She was much affected and would not be present but remained in prayer in the {House}: at this time and long after she had much to feel from disapprobation especially of many priests and others. Much jealousy existed regarding the Sisters of Charity!'" So the principal lady was not present at the dedication of her own chapel because the experience was more than she could bear!"*⁴

Several shifts happened in me as I read these accounts. I was experiencing Catherine in darkness, and the shading of this person into a three dimensional perspective had begun. I was also experiencing myself in Mercy as I was, a wanderer down darkened corridors of our history, being present to the inability of another. The face of compassion emerged in my inward gaze as opposed to driven service.

After reading these accounts of the chapel blessing ceremonies, the journey, the walking around the sculpture as work of art had begun. I continued paging through the *Letters* to see if I might catch another glimpse of this theme of "unable" in the life of a woman whose spirituality is so apostolic, so outward. Yet as in a sculpture, it is the absences that help us to define the form, the negative space that hollows out in order to define the shape. Catherine's life of art slowly began to yield shape for me.

**It seems that for Catherine,
the cross was a familiar reality
that she was frequently
able to name and even
at times welcome.**

This place of "unable" felt different from the strong sense of the cross that we have traditionally known in Catherine. The strain of "Cross and Crown" stands on its own both in her words and in other's reflection on her spirituality. It seems that for Catherine, the cross was a familiar reality that she was frequently able to name and even at times welcome. She knew its form, recognized its appearance and often had some clear rules about how she and her sisters might deal with it, accept it, surrender to it, and ultimately even overcome it. "We are flourishing in the very midst at the cross, thanks be to God."⁶ "You are on the secure high road of the Cross."⁷ "My dear sisters, do you want to spoil the cross our divine Lord has asked us to carry today? Let us go to choir and thank Him for His loving forethought in asking us to walk with Him."⁸

According to *Tender Courage*, she identifies and experiences the cross in external events, in dealings with the clergy, in situations with her communities at a distance. We sense some element of trust bordering on control here. She frequently admonishes her sisters to accept, and God will "soon come with blessings."⁹ Not so with this dark place of "unable." It is another creature entirely. As I journeyed through her life and her *Letters* with an eye for this creature I was drawn to one other time that seemed to exhibit this same shadow quality of "unable."

In a letter to Frances Warde dated March 5, 1841, she introduces us to "the cough". "My rather new visitant, a cough, has been with me very constantly since the first Sunday after my return... I do think that a cough has made a resting place with me, and will be no unusual visitor in future."¹⁰ With her years of experience at the bedside of her own sisters and of her own poor, she surely knows what this "new visitant" means for her life. The reality of it, understated as it is here, throws her along a path whose end will be transformed in the offering of a comfortable cup of tea in the midst of her conscious giving over of life.

**"See how quietly the great God
performs all his mighty works:
darkness is spread
over us at night and light
returns in the morning"**

With the very next paragraph of the letter in which the cough is given space in her life, Catherine begins a commentary on Mary Clare (Augustine) Moore, "A character not suited to my taste of my ability to govern."¹¹ She discovers herself "unable" in the face of this woman - why? "She teased and perplexed me so much about the difficulty of copying two pages, that I was really obliged to give up, unwilling to command lest it should produce disedifying consequences. She said it would take the entire Lent. Indeed, you can have no idea how little she does in a week..."¹² Clare Moore was an artist. The only time I had read this account before was when I had come upon it in *Tender Courage*.¹³ I closed the book at that point and never picked it up again. It burned to know in words the harsh judgment of Catherine on the work of an artist. It left me with little hope for a communal vocabulary of a spirituality of art in Mercy, if this were so deep in the charism.

There are works of art that challenge me, yet I am formed by their unrelenting beauty and truth. Some of Van Gogh's works can be like that. The German artist, Kathe Kowitz, folk art from Peru, some surprising examples from modern art, ancient icons whose beauty grows to bursting point, Daumier, Picasso in his social commentary, Rembrandt's etchings, Giacometti's sculptures, nature's own landscape presentations: all of these speak, and I stay with them, until they begin to reveal their secrets. Why not give this letter, this woman that same opportunity?

So, a sentence away from her casual discourse on a cough that has taken up residence in her life, bringing with it the dark shadow of physical diminishment, Catherine's energy bursts forth in seemingly unrelated

and strongly negative comments about Clare (Augustine) Moore. Clare's lack of productivity as judged by Catherine renders the foundress exasperated and unable to govern... I began to suspect that her response to Moore was merely a deflection of her reaction to "the cough", an embodied symbol of this dark visitor, a visitor that would alter Catherine's way of being and doing from then on.

Her life of work and service was shaken. What a terrible threat it must have been to the self image and self-worth of one who in 1838 put before her Sisters of Mercy the following ideal: "We have a striking example before us every day of the power we possess of exercising unwearied efforts of body and mind in the perpetual movement of the steam train carriages which do not cease from morning till night"¹⁴ This letter, then, seems to link us to a greater unable that plunged Catherine into the shadowed reality of dying. Her exasperation had little to do with the tedious artwork of one of her own, and everything to do with her acknowledging a cough that would plunge her toward the edge of life and beyond.

An early story tells us Catherine had a great fear of death. This description of her mother, Elinor comes from Neumann's introductory sketch: "Enjoying life and all the pleasures the world had to offer, Elinor departed from it so reluctantly that Catherine never forgot the agonizing experience of watching her mother die. It instilled in her an excessive dread of dying which continued until a few hours before her own death, when she exclaimed, "If I thought death could be so sweet, I never should have feared it."¹⁵

In young adulthood, Catherine waited faithfully with Mrs. Callahan through those final years of the woman's life: "The last two years of her (Mrs. Callahan) life she spent a confirmed invalid in a darkened room where the blinds were seldom raised and even a lamp had to be carefully shaded".¹⁶ At a much later time, Catherine employed an image that perhaps was the transformation of this dark, "unable" time. The poetic language gives us a rare glimpse and access to Catherine's interiority. "See how quietly the great God performs all his mighty works: darkness is spread over us at night and light returns in the morning and there is no noise of closing shutters or drawing curtains."¹⁷ Does she encounter this same quiet darkness in her time of "unable" as she waits in the shadow of the chapel blessing ceremonies? Does she encounter it again and in a deeper way in her body, as it yields to the first symptoms of a fatal disease?

I continued the slow contemplative walk around the sculpture. From this shifting view, this three-dimensional exploration, another aspect came into focus. As a child, transplanted from a Catholic atmosphere and bereft of religious symbols, we are told that Catherine prayed with the image of the cross which she found in the panels and beams of the door. "Branches of the trees and bushes also formed them-

selves in her gaze."¹⁸ "When nothing but a child, she painstakingly copied the Psalter of Jesus, and for a long time, it and the Universal Prayer were the only prayers Catherine knew.¹⁹ Her body holds the memory of these times, the child's clear seeing, the earnest efforts at making the Word tangible.

Despite herself, she still possesses these seeds of intuitive seeing, and perhaps reacts in drivenness against them in the face of impending loss, declaring herself instead unable to govern someone who in adulthood "painstakingly copies" the holy words. What has she done with the seeing that found the cross in trees and bushes of her youthful devotion and determination? The texture of the cough plunges her into the darkness of unable, shrouding her from the comfort she might receive from another. Instead she creates a gruff distance from beauty and seeing, and hides behind a role: her ability to govern, her tendency to judge, to sum up.

Did Claire Augustine Moore walk along the dark corridors of Baggot street until she found Catherine in the darkness of unable? And did she sit with her in the truest silence of that moment? We her sisters would hope that it happened that way.

Can we, with Catherine, trust this transforming place of inability, this grace that is unbidden, uninvited and so beyond our desire or control?

As we journey more deeply with Catherine into this place, we go to the life of Jesus, Catherine's great model for mercy, and there find the gospel moments of "unable." In visiting them, we know with assurance that this place is one to which we are all called and invited, periodically and eventually. We catch glimpses of times when Jesus stood in that place of unable, under the powerful scrutiny of others, feeling what we feel when we are inadequate to people's expectations, when we are judged because of insufficient action, when we are just who we are in the face of our inability.

As a young man, at the home of his friends, Martha and Mary, Jesus is stung by Mary's cry of anguish, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn. 11:32) Jesus wept, overcome both by the loss, and his own moment of mysterious "unable." More devastating yet is the deep pain of not being understood but rather being accused by a friend in the face of that very inability. And in the crowd he hears, "He opened the eyes of the blind man; could he not have prevented this man's death?" (Jn. 11:37) Jesus

weeps again when he is unable to gather Jerusalem to himself: "How often have I longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks. (Lk. 13:34) At the scene of his dying, he is invited again to make things clear: "If you are the Christ, bring yourself down from the cross." (Mt. 27:40, 42) In this moment of chosen "unable," the darkness becomes as dense as it can be. There will be no proof, no rescue - just the transforming point of "unable."

We hear Jesus say that we are, all of us, "unable." And does he hear, as God desires each of us to hear, the words of the Creator: "My grace is sufficient to you; my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9)

As Jesus is Catherine's model, so is he here, in that undefined place we have been probing. In that context and perspective, can we know and acknowledge this place of "unable" as gift and grace within our charism? And what are the implications of this grace for us, as women of Mercy, as a community of Mercy, as daughters of Catherine, and as the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy?

- That God awaits each of us in a unique way in that vast place of "unable."

- That I am called to name my drivenness and at times to move away from it, entering into a darker place of waiting and listening....

- That the charism invites me to moments of reverencing the unable in another - and to resisting the sinfulness of misnaming or judging the meaning of that place in another's life.

- That as we feel overwhelmed by sinful structures, by ministry demands, by our own diminishing numbers, we might turn instead away from doing and the unrelenting search for answers, to learn a deeper response from Catherine and from Christ.

- That, rather than seeking to destroy its reflection outside of us by criticizing others who are caught in their inability, we enter into this place of paralysis and fear, in order to allow the experience of it to be truly our own.

Can we, with Catherine, trust this transforming place of inability, this grace that is unbidden, uninvited and so beyond our desire or control? Can we mine its wealth and wisdom for our larger Mercy world as we search out the tools inherent in the charism that will bring us to the edges of our most authentic form? What is this work of art, its ancient expression, its modern face, its future shape that teaches us by its form and content, by its space and solidity, by the shadows that it casts, by its beauty, mystery and challenge? Where are we in our willingness to walk slowly around this sculpture, allowing our sight to expand, our knowing to deepen? Can we trust the dark empty space that yields us form? Will we eventually give this piece of creation to each other and to our world? Will we be graced by "unable?"

Footnotes

1. A Sister of Mercy, *The Spirit of Catherine McAuley*, (Oklahoma City: Mt. St. Mary's Academy Press, 1922.), 7-8.
2. *Ibid.*, 74.
3. Sister Mary Ignatia Newmann, R.S.M., ed, *Letters of Catherine McAuley 1827-1841*, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, Inc., 1969), 20.
4. Letter from Mother Mary Anne Doyle to Sister M. Clare Augustine Moore.
5. Sister M. Bertrand Degnan, R.S.M., *Mercy Unto Thousands*, (Maryland: The Neuman Press, 1957), 96. A slightly different version is described by S.M. Angela Bolster, *Catherine McAuley: In Her Own Words* (Wesford: John English and Co., 1978), 31. "Canon Kelley delivered his first tirade on 4 June 1829 on the occasion of the dedication of the chapel in Baggot Street, at which he had been one of the two priests assisting Dr. Murray. His outburst was so vehement that Catherine absented herself from the reception given after the ceremony."
6. *Letters*, 125.
7. *Ibid.*, 352.
8. *The Spirit of Catherine McAuley*, 45.
9. *Letters*, 204.
10. *Ibid.*, 311.
11. *Ibid.*, 311.
12. *Ibid.*, 311.
13. M. Joanna Regan, R.S.M., Isabelle Keiss, R.S.M., *Tender Courage*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 125.
14. *Letters*, 131.
15. *Letters*, 4.
16. *Letters*, 8.
17. *Letters*
18. *The Spirit of Catherine McAuley*, 47.
19. *Ibid.*, 47.

Contributors

Katherine Doyle, RSM (Auburn) is currently Director of Catholic Faith Formation for the Diocese of Sacramento. She received her Masters in Education from the University of San Francisco and a Masters in Liturgical Studies from St. John's University, Collegeville. She serves as Liturgy Coordinator for her regional community and is currently working on a study of Mother Mary Baptist Russell, founder of the Auburn and Burlingame communities.

Rita Marie Valade, RSM (Detroit) is currently Vocation Coordinator for her regional community and part-time Social Work faculty at University of Detroit Mercy. Having recently completed her M.A. in Systematic Theology, she wrote a thesis titled, "Catherine McAuley and the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy: An Ecclesiological Analysis."

Julia Ann Upton, RSM (Brooklyn) is professor of Theology at St. John's University (New York) and author of *A Church for the Next Generation: Sacraments in Transition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990) and *Becoming a Catholic Christian* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1993).

Moiria Hunt is an Irish woman from Cork with extensive experience in spirituality and youth ministry. She completed her undergraduate work at Maynooth and is currently a graduate student in the theology department at St. John's University, New York.

Ann Marie Caron (New York) is Assistant Professor in the Religious Studies Department at Saint Joseph College where she teaches spirituality, theology and liturgy in the undergraduate and graduate programs.

Marianne Hieb, RSM (Philadelphia) coordinates the spirituality programs at Lourdes Wellness Center in New Jersey and teaches in the Graduate Holistic Spirituality Program at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. She holds an M.F.A. degree from Catholic University, is a registered art therapist and studied spiritual direction at the Shalem Institute of Spiritual Formation at Washington Theological Union. She brings a special interest to the use of art and creativity in retreat and spiritual direction ministry and recently published *Art-Journaling: A Wellness model in New Research in Arts — Medicine*.

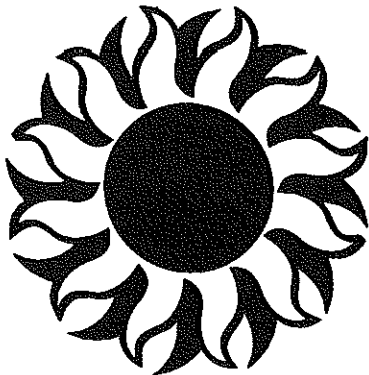
Celebrations of Life

by Jean Roche, RSM

Celebrations of Life is an 74-page collection of non-denominational services with a universal appeal. Rooted in a view of spirituality as connectedness to creation, self, others and God, these experiences have been a source of healing, unity and peace for many participants. Easily adapted for a variety of groups, the prayers, poems, visualizations, rituals and music may be integrated into more specific religious traditions as well.

Celebrations of Life also contains meditations facilitating inner healing, creative visualizations centered on life-review, suggestions for memorial services, a variety of rituals for celebrating life as well as commemorating the moment of death, ideas for staff renewal and practical suggestions regarding the creation of an atmosphere conducive to heartfelt sharing.

This book is published exclusively by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, Albany. Permission is granted to reprint original material located in the Appendices.



A former elementary and secondary school teacher with a Master's degree in English, Jean Roche, RSM has also served as an administrator for the Sisters of Mercy. Having been certified in "Psycho-Spiritual Counseling" at Loretto Heights College in Denver, Colorado, Sister Jean was appointed Chaplain at St. Peter's Hospice of Albany where she has served for the last ten years.

The author of numerous articles on spirituality which have appeared in publications such as Health Progress, Rehabilitation Nursing and the Pastoral Care Journal, Sister Jean has offered workshops and renewal experiences across the country and in Alaska. Active in education with respect to spirituality, she has lectured to groups of all religious denominations. She has also been involved in organizing support groups and renewal experiences for professionals, patients, caregivers and bereaved persons.

Among the recipients of her workshops on the spiritual care of terminally ill patients and their families are nursing homes, educational institutions, hospitals, the American Cancer Society, the Aids Council, hospices, home health agencies and specific groups such as physicians of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

To order your copy(ies) of *Celebrations of Life*, please complete the order form below and return it, with full payment, to:

Religious Sisters of Mercy
634 New Scotland Avenue
Albany, New York 12208
Attention: Communications Center.

Please allow 3-4 weeks for delivery.

Celebrations of Life

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____

Please make check or money order payable to **Religious Sisters of Mercy**. (Do not send cash.)

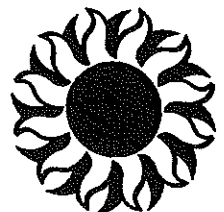
Please send me _____ copy(ies) of *Celebrations of Life* at \$9.95 each.

(\$1.50 for 1 copy - \$1.90 for 2 copies)

Sub-total _____

Shipping/handling _____

Total _____



MERCY HIGH SCHOOL
1501 South 48th Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68106

Non-Profit Org.
U. S. Postage
PAID
Omaha, Nebraska
Permit No. 879

Frances Fico
St. John's University
Jamaica NY 11439