

The **MAST** *Journal*

The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology
VOL. 4, NO. 2 SPRING 1994

Religious Life: Considering the Future

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Dear Sisters and Friends,

Lent is the season for returning to the roots of our relationship with God, whether that experience be grounded in trauma or peace, healing or hope. Most essentially, Lent is the church's traditional invitation to recover a sense of rootedness within ourselves. No person can resolve for another the tension between two competing inner claims: holding to the foundational ground of the soul, yet yielding to change. Lent is not a season for escaping the life of responsibility and care, nor for redeeming our consciences by petty sacrifices of domestic pleasures. Rather, it offers the possibility of imagining ourselves as doers of projects that require magnanimity and generosity. This sort of future-oriented vision calls for a mobilization of our resources of mind, spirit, emotion, body and voice. It typically requires we have to come to a full stop so we can see ahead, to turn and get a sense of where we are, or to refocus so we can see it clearly in the midst of all that lies in front of our gaze. This is conversion or *metanoia*. It leads some to prayer, some to action, according to the season of the spirit.

Self-maintenance is a related but separate task from vision-getting. Ministerial values in themselves, no matter how gospel-oriented or how corporately affirmed, cannot mend hearts, heal memories, or revitalize a congregation's apostolic project. The determination to serve God compels us as individuals. No religious community began with thousands of members, and none flourished without ebbs and tides. In the beginning, two or three had a compelling determination to fix what was wrong with the diminishments other people suffered. The name which Sisters of Mercy give this urgency is compassion. If compassion is authentic, the righting of evil is clearly too large a task for a single individual, no matter how grand-hearted. Too many people are suffering. Information and data augment, but don't replace, a primal sense of outrage at situations which demand redress. The solution is not "triage," a pragmatic sorting out of dead, dying and recoverably wounded on the battlefield. Compassion makes us communitarian. Religious life is one visible expression of many people's compassion. Women lay out their life project, together, because of its consequences.

Religious life has always been counter-cultural, liminal in many ways. Yet the last decade has involved various ecclesial projects whose sub-text concerns the question, "What's wrong with religious life?" The presumption is that consecrated life has always been located at the center of the church's organizational life. Within this frame, it is not really accurate to identify mission with governance structure. "Central to the mission of the church" is a theological statement of women's prophetic identity, but "central" is not equivalent to their position in ecclesial organization. It may be sufficient to assert that "fixing" religious life will not in itself convert a materialistic culture, end war, change the governance style of a monarchical church, reinvent the language that grounds the faith of believers, or vindicate women for the injustices committed against them in society for millennia.

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.

Celebrating 150 Years in the U.S.A.:

Frances Warde, RSM

Marilyn Gouailhardou, RSM

Comments presented during Eucharist for a Mercy Day celebration, Sept. 26, 1993, in Burlingame, CA

10,000 Mercies. 10,000 acts of mercy, 10,000 Sisters of Mercy. In 1965 there were over 10,000 Mercies in the United States. Today due to post-Vatican II changes in the church and in society there are a little over 7,000, more than half of whom trace their beginnings to one woman. This Mercy Day we celebrate 150 years of ministry in this country and it is fitting to honor the woman who made the first foundation of Sisters of Mercy in the United States at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on December 21, 1843.

By 1827 young Fanny Warde, aged 17, had lost both parents, a sister, and her favorite brother, and was moving in the upper circles of Dublin society where she met Catherine McAuley's niece, Mary Theresa. Joining the group of young women assisting Catherine in her ministry, Frances Warde showed such gifts that it was she whom Catherine left in charge of Baggot Street when she entered the Presentation novitiate in 1830. Frances was one of the first four sisters professed by Catherine in 1833. In 1837 she was sent as the superior to the new Carlow Foundation from which she in turn founded Naas in 1839, Wexford in 1840, and Westport in 1842.

Courageous in the face of persecution, Frances was an early ecumenist, attracting many to the faith through her adult classes in religion.

In 1843 Bishop O'Connell of Pittsburgh came to Carlow to ask for Sisters for his new diocese created that same year. Together with six other sisters, Frances Warde endured a long and arduous journey, arriving in what was then a small pioneer town; and amidst much hardship opened a poor school, an academy, and at the same time nursed the sick poor. It was in Pittsburgh that the first Mercy Hospital in the world was opened. By 1846 enough young women had joined them to make possible a new foundation in Chicago. These were years of much suffering. Frances' return trip to Pittsburgh from Chicago is a tale of hardship in epic proportions, always mentioned in accounts of her life. In the Pittsburgh typhus epidemic of 1848, four out of five of the nursing Sisters died in a period of two months. But in spite of all the suffering, the Pittsburgh

foundation began to prosper. In 1851 Frances was asked to head a foundation to Providence, Rhode Island. From Providence she established several foundations in New England, going herself to Manchester in 1858 where, after establishing several more foundations, she remained till her death in 1884.

A most remarkable woman, Frances Warde started foundations with nothing but an invitation from the local Bishop of a diocese and the enthusiastic young women who were so attracted to her and her mission. The numerous deaths of her young sisters caused her great suffering, but did not daunt her; nor did the hostility and violence of the fiery anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Party so active in New England in the 1850's. Courageous in the face of persecution, Frances was an early ecumenist attracting many to the faith through her adult classes in religion. She also had to deal with the local bishop's undue interference in the internal affairs of the congregation in both Chicago and Manchester.

In spite of a wide age difference, Catherine McAuley and Frances Warde seem to have been kindred spirits. Catherine's letters to Frances reflect a mutual understanding and closeness not found in her other correspondence. Even though the seeds of Frances' Christian vision were sown early in her life through her family, it was in the thirteen years she spent in close friendship and in ministry with Catherine McAuley that this vision matured. Frances expressed in her instructions to the novices and postulants under her care that formation first in Christianity and the love of Christ must precede knowledge of religious life and its constitutions; and that charity, sincerity, poverty, obedience and patience were the essential qualities necessary for a life in Mercy. She also believed with Teresa of Avila that "the government of women requires a science quite different from that of the most learned and pious of men."

Her spiritual vision was the foundational basis of all her activity. A strong faith in Jesus Christ was reflected in a singleness of purpose that raised her above a life of mediocrity. Frances's knowledge and love of Scripture kept her from pious sentimentality on the one hand, and self-righteous austerity on the other, and fostered in her a simplicity with regard to her accomplishments. Her trust in God gave her a courage to sustain not only great physical hardship, but also the heart-felt suffering of rejection, persecution and loss. She always remembered Catherine's advice: "Put your trust in God and not in any man." Frances's great compassion for the poor, the sick and

those ignorant of the love and the mercy of God fostered in her a missionary spirit that resulted in at least 24 direct foundations in her lifetime, and these in turn were the source of many more.

Pittsburgh 1843

Chicago 1846
Loretto 1848
Providence 1851
Baltimore 1855
Titusville 1870 (Erie)
Wilkes-Barre 1875 (Plainfield)

Providence 1851

Hartford 1852
Rochester 1857
Manchester 1858
St. Augustine 1859
Nashville 1866
Fall River MA 1874

Manchester 1858

Philadelphia 1861 (Merion)
Omaha 1864
Portland ME 1874
Yreka CA 1871 (Rio Vista)
Burlington VT 1874
Bordentown NJ 1875 (Plainfield)

In the words of Sister Kathleen Healy, RSM, one of Frances's biographers, "Her openness to reality in the psychological sense, and her singleness of purpose in the spiritual sense, somehow closed that gap between belief and witness which for many Christians seems to be average, if not normal."

Contributors

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Becoming Partners in the New Institute

Doris Gottemoeller, RSM

Address given to the Associates and Directors of Associate Programs, May 2, 1992 at Madison, CT

The experience of yesterday's sessions was like being in a popcorn factory — questions and opinions shooting off in many directions, sometimes colliding, sometimes glancing off one another or missing one another completely. In addition to questions and opinions I heard differing experiences, differing assessments of the same experience, unspoken and unexamined assumptions (e.g., about what 'mutuality' is and how best to achieve it); a desire for definitions and for greater clarity; and some doubt about whether definitive answers are needed or desirable, at least at this time. Individual associates pointed out that they were not necessarily speaking for all of the associates in their regional community — in fact, quite the opposite.

This amount of ambiguity is stimulating to the perceivers and frustrating to the judges! However, it doesn't make for very conclusive conversations, and this group is apt to come back next year, or in two years, with exactly the same array of questions, opinions, etc.

"Associates are men and women who share in various aspects of our Mercy life and ministry."

However, there is a sense among us that the new Institute should make a difference in all of this. If this is a new moment, then at least some of the questions should look different than they did pre-July . . . or we should have different resources for tackling them. This section of the program is entitled, "Integration," so perhaps the best thing I can do is (1) answer the questions that I think can be answered, and (2) organize and prioritize the questions that can't be answered yet. This list could set an agenda for the next three to five years; it could provide a framework for our discussions which might help move them in some orderly fashion.

First Question:

Who is a member of the Sisters of Mercy?

According to the *Constitutions* adopted last July by the first Institute Chapter, affirmed by Rome, and currently being distributed, membership in the Sisters of Mercy begins with first profession (C. 30). There is only one type or class of members. There are no 'asso-

ciate members.

Can this change? Yes, it can. It takes an act of the Institute chapter, subsequently affirmed by Rome. The next time this could happen would be in 1995. Of course if we want the *Constitutions* changed, some member(s) will have to submit a proposal to the chapter, and some discussion and research should precede it.

(I personally don't see how we could introduce different classes of membership without creating an implicit hierarchy, with grades and degrees of belonging.)

Second Question:

What is an Associate of the Sisters of Mercy?

To move on in a more creative vein, I would like to turn to the image of 'partners' (which is part of the title of this conference) to come to some understanding of what it means to be an associate of the Sisters of Mercy. As an image, partnership is challenging and provocative. The dictionary indicates the many contexts in which partner can be used:

A person associated with another or others in some activity of common interest, especially: a member of a business partnership, a spouse, either of two persons dancing together, one of a pair or a team in a game or sport, e.g., bridge or tennis.

Note that a relationship of partnership is not necessarily one of identical or equal roles. Business ventures have managing partners and silent partners. In a dance partnership, one leads and the other follows. Some card games have a dummy partner!

The dictionary goes on to distinguish partner from ally, colleague, confederate, accomplice, or associate. All denote one who cooperates in a venture, occupation, or challenge. But partner implies "a relationship, frequently between two persons, in which each has equal status and a certain independence, but also implicit or formal obligations to the other or others."

Our Mercy Directory says, "Associates are men and women who share in various aspects of our Mercy life and ministry" (6.1). At its most basic, association is about sharing life. How can/should we think about this relationship, now and in the future? What can we do to create a desirable future?

I began by asking myself what we share and what we don't share, and then I drew a diagram. Here is the list of what we don't necessarily share.

Mercy Associates

- men and women
- lay or clerical
- any faith tradition

Sisters of Mercy

- women only
- lay only
- Catholic

Mercy Associates

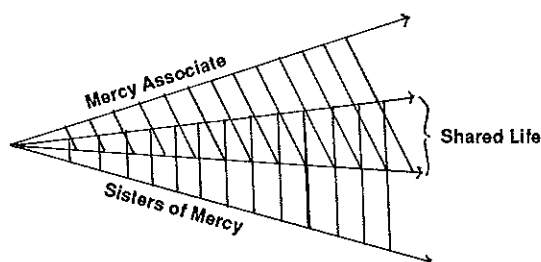
- temporary commitment, renewed indefinitely
- bound by promises which are specific to the individual

- married or free to marry
- free to own/manage property
- free to make autonomous decisions

Sisters of Mercy

- permanent commitment
- bound by prescriptions of a *Constitutions* which describe life of ministry, community, and spirituality
- vowed to celibacy
- vowed to poverty
- vowed to obedience

Here is the diagram:



Note that this diagram does not display the fact that there are many differences *within* each group. Individuals differ in fervor, talent, gifts, insights; they are more or less sincere or enthusiastic. (The upper section is more diverse in terms of life experience and common commitment than the lower. We'll come back to this point later.) But these personal differences among individuals do not change the fact that there are common characteristics of each group which we can 'diagram.'

... the heart of the special relationship between Mercy associates and sisters is a common love for, and understanding of, the Mercy charism.

What is the essence of the relationship between associates and sisters? What do they share in common? *What belongs in the middle section of the diagram?* First of all, associates and sisters share the Gospel and the common Christian vocation of prayer, worship, love and service of neighbor. But the heart of the special relationship between Mercy associates and sisters is a common love for, and understanding of, the Mercy charism. Mercy associates are men and women who have experienced God's mercy, who want to

incorporate it into their lives and actions. Sisters of Mercy have likewise "responded in faith to God's mercy" and "committed themselves to follow Jesus Christ in his compassion for suffering people" (C.1-2). This 'vocation to mercy,' if you will, is the heart and center of the relationship between Mercy associates and sisters. The mutual attraction to mercy is what draws the two groups together.

Third Question:

How can we deepen the relationship between Sisters of Mercy and Mercy associates?

Our challenge is how to enhance, enrich, deepen and nourish the relationship between two groups. In terms of our diagram, how can we enlarge the center section? (There were numerous comments yesterday about how to bring more sisters 'on board' with the associate program, how to interest more lay persons in becoming associates, and how to make the relationship more satisfying to all participants.)

First of all, the relationship will be enhanced by honoring and appreciating the *differences* between the two groups. Note that the center section of the diagram will grow if the two outer sections do. To premise a relationship on beliefs such as, "religious life is dead," or "associates are want-to-be religious," is not life-affirming or life enhancing. What is needed from each group to support an adult-to-adult relationship is a positive appreciation of the life-choices of the other.

Secondly, the relationship will be enhanced by recognizing areas of obligation, of autonomy, and of mutuality. What are the obligations which associates and sisters freely assume in this relationship? Strictly speaking, associates oblige themselves to fidelity to the promises they make. Depending on how the regional community structures the program, they may also be obliged to attend some meetings or other events and, perhaps, to support the program financially. Sisters, in turn, oblige themselves to maintain the program, to provide staff support, opportunities for interaction and sharing between and among associates and sisters, etc.

At the same time, the autonomy of each group has to be respected. Associates are free to marry, raise their families, manage their property, move away, quit the program, etc., without accountability to, or comment from, the religious congregation. Sisters are equally free to manage the congregation, choose their leadership, govern themselves, invest community assets, etc., without seeking input from associates. This is the element of independence which the definition of partner implies.

Only when the areas of obligation and autonomy are understood and accepted, can we freely explore the area of real mutuality. Mutuality calls us to growth in the relationship and to deepening our understanding of, and commitment to, mercy. I envision associates and sisters exploring together the meaning of mercy

not only in Catherine McAuley's life, but also in one another's. Associates and sisters could bring their different experiences and perspectives to dialogue on social justice issues, ministry concerns, and spiritual insights. They might commit together to some specific project of Christian service. They should surely support one another's ministry, share prayer, celebrate, and deepen their friendship in mercy. What is key to a mature relationship is that each respects where the other is coming from and values their differences as well as their similarities.

Associates and sisters could bring their different experiences and perspectives to dialogue on social justice issues, ministry concerns, and spiritual insights.

I feel that the development of the associate relationship has gotten somewhat sidetraced at times by discussions of who gets what community mailing and who attends what community event. Keeping clear the distinctions between areas of obligation, of autonomy, and of mutuality might help clarify these discussions.

Fourth Question: Should Mercy association be standardized in the new Institute?

At present associate relationship varies widely from regional community to regional community with regard to history, structure, and program. In some cases the individual associate's primary relationship is with a local Mercy community or a small group of sisters, in other cases it is with the regional community as such. As I indicated above, associates themselves differ a great deal in their intentionality and commitment to the relationship.

As I see it, there would be advantages and disadvantages of standardizing the program. On the positive side, some standardization would facilitate the development of materials and experiences across the Institute. Each regional community would not have to design its own brochure, incorporation program, commitment ceremony, etc. Neighboring regional communities might share staff or develop common experiences such as retreats. Standardization would promote commonality among associates, so that when they meet across regional community lines, they would share more common assumptions and experiences. Finally, standardization of programs would facilitate study and evaluation of the experience at a future date.

On the negative side, standardization would imply a greater need for commonality of persons, their backgrounds, preparation, and commitment. Some of our present associates might be left out, or we would have to develop grades or degrees or types or kinds of associates to accommodate the diverse expectations and interests. Not standardizing allows a greater variety of experiences to evolve and to be evaluated at a later date.

Fifth Question: Should a Mercy association be formally established?

I am using 'formal establishment' in the legal or even canonical sense. I admit that this question is a bit 'tongue-in-cheek,' but I do think that it should be seriously considered at some point. One way to promote greater mutuality between associates and Sisters of Mercy might be for the former to have their own organization, with a charter and by-laws, structure and elected leadership. Then the two organizations would be peers in an organizational sense.

There is ample precedent for this in the church's history. Third orders have a long and rich history. We may tend to think of them as belonging more to the Middle Ages, but some of them have undergone their own post-Vatican II renewal and adaptation. Ginny Cunningham, our former Institute Director of Communications, has an excellent article in the April '92 *U.S. Catholic* on third orders today. She defines them as follows:

Third Orders is a catchall phrase for those canonically approved societies of secular people who are stirred by the same ideals that inspired men and women to found religious orders: the Franciscan ideal of peace, justice, prayer, and respect for nature; the Benedictine longing for stability, equality, community, and conversion; the Dominican thirst for scholarship; the Carmelite gift of contemplation and meditation; and so on.

Could we add, the Mercy ideal of compassionate service to those most in need? Ginny distinguishes the third orders from other lay societies and associations by "their canonical status, their association with a religious order if only in their stated purpose to live the order's spirituality as lay-people, and their stability, which is marked by requirements for admission and an organizational structure, formation period, public profession, and rule by which they strive to live." The activities which members of third orders commit themselves to sound very much like what most of our associates embrace.

There is also warrant for a formal organization of associates in church law. Canons 298-329 comprise a section in the Code of Canon Law entitled "Associations of the Christian Faithful." Canon 298 reads:

In the Church there are associations distinct from

institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, in which the Christian faithful, either clergy or laity, or clergy and laity together, strive by common effort to promote a more perfect life or to foster public worship or Christian doctrine or to exercise other apostolic works, namely to engage in efforts of evangelization, to exercise works of piety or charity and to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit.

Subsequent canons deal with the potential rights and responsibilities of such associations and their members. (As an aside, we might note that such associations are being developed to assume sponsorship of institutions after religious congregations and dioceses withdraw from them. This is an area of experimentation in the church.)

Similar to the idea of standardization, formal organization of a Mercy association would have advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it might give the relationship greater stability and continuity. One of the concerns I frequently hear expressed is what will happen to the associates when the sisters withdraw from an area. A formal association opens the door to more self-responsibility on the part of associates and, perhaps, to greater mutuality between associates and members. It might connote a more formal, mature relationship between the association and the Institute.

In terms of the diagram on page 4, we can note that it shows a relationship between an *individual associate* and a *group* (either a local community or a regional community). This disparity works against mutuality.

On the negative side, such an association might be perceived as too 'church' or formal. Associates prize the spontaneity and informality of their relationship with sisters, and might find maintaining their own organization burdensome. Even if the idea of formal organization has merit, it is probably premature at this point. This question definitely follows the previous one on standardization.

* * *

Let's come back to the perspective of the new Institute. In our Founding Document we said, "We have entered into a new relationship." In so doing we released tremendous energy. We find ourselves eager to share our lives and resources, especially the precious resource of Mercy, with one another and with the poor.

Association is also a new relationship . . . *but not the same one*. It has its own energy and potential for renewing us and the church. We need to allow this energy to transform us into more merciful people. This is the gift we have to share with God's people. I hope that the next time we gather we can share how we have responded to this challenge.

Questions for Discussion

1. Besides "clamping down," what are strategies Church leadership could take to foster good relations with women religious? Ideally, what might the relationship between bishops and religious women look like in the future?
2. What episodes in the history of the Mercy Sisters are cause for encouragement, even in the face of present difficulties?
3. What is your understanding of religious life in the light of the larger context identified in *Enkindling the Embers*?
4. What aspects of religious life presently most enable you to sustain your commitment to religious life?
5. Do you agree or disagree with Jeffries that knowing too much can impede rather than facilitate action on behalf of people in need?
6. At various historical periods, political persecution threatened the survivability of religious life. Now, demographical studies and assessment of membership trends identify real challenges for the continuance of religious life. What do you think are the expressions of religious life that don't depend on numbers?
7. How have you seen "spirituality for leadership" in action?
8. In what ways are you called to exercise a "spirituality for leadership" in your ministry? Which ideas particularly struck a chord within you?
9. As you walk around the city where you live, what call of God reaches you from its streets?

Enkindling the Embers: The Challenge of Current Research on Religious Life

Janet Ruffing, RSM

*Presentation to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious on August 17, 1993.
We thank the LCWR for giving us permission to reprint it here.*

As I thought about this presentation, an image of transformation, the living flame of love¹ came to mind. Out of the embers, a dying fire bursts again into flames. This image captures our experience of the divine energy when it suffuses our spiritual center from within, enkindling and igniting our passion, energy, mission, and zeal. It is the compassion that rises in our hearts; our indignation in the face of injustice. It is the fiery spirit for which we pray in the *Veni Creator*,—God's gift, a living fountain, love, and spiritual ointment. It is the same spirit whom the mystic, Hildegard, invokes when she prays: "Fiery Spirit, fount of courage, life within life of all that has being."² This is, of course, Pentecostal imagery, tongues of fire making prophets and evangelizers of paralyzed disciples, who much to their surprise made bold proclamations as the Spirit prompted. It is the same fire Jesus brought to earth, longing for its enkindling.

**We experience this living flame
subjectively as energy,
enthusiasm, and wholeness in
the midst of difficult and
demanding ministries.**

The current research on religious life employs images of confusion and chaos, of diminishment and decline, of lack of focus, of invisibility. Others have written of walking where there is no path or of seeing in the dark. Yet I remain convinced that whatever religious life will be in the coming millennium, it will rise up again from the dying embers of the present moment. Despite the enormous challenges religious life as an institution faces in the next ten years, there are new experiences of God and fresh passion for ministry which continue to burst into flame within and among us. That is what energizes you in leadership and your sisters in their ministry.

We experience this living flame subjectively as energy, enthusiasm, and wholeness in the midst of difficult and demanding ministries. We experience it as connection to our founding charisms, reclaimed with fresh purpose, in the lives of a significant number of our members. Yes, the dying and dysfunction is all around us, but so too is an enkindling in many individ-

ual apostolic religious women.

The research I drew on for these reflections includes: The LCWR Ministry Survey,³ the Executive Summary and Survey Instrument of the Nygren/Ukeritis Study,⁴ "The Brookland Commission Papers," a smaller study of 1,000 women religious presented at a conference in October of 1992,⁵ and a review by Grindel and Peters of ten research projects on religious life funded by the Lilly Endowment.⁶

The Context

The Executive Summary of the Nygren/Ukeritis Study which shall be referred to as the FORUS Study insists that every institute must maximize or release the energy of the named driving forces in order to resist their opposites, which they termed "restraining forces," if institutes hope to emerge transformed. Further, they emphasize that the quality of leadership will strongly determine the outcome. Overcoming restraining forces is easier said than done. These forces are at work in each of us, absorbed with the cultural air we breathe. But even more than that, they and we are contextualized in a much larger ecological and global reality. The introduction to the LCWR Planning and Ministry Survey concisely painted this picture. Our deepest challenges emerge from the larger context. Religious life is presently limited by its cosmological and philosophical world views. Not only is religious life itself on a strange and perilous journey, but so too are the planet and its cultures.

The context of religious life includes not only U.S. culture with all of its promise and limitation, but also the profound changes initiated by Vatican II. These are now meeting fierce resistance within the post-conciliar church. There is unfolding a total change in our story of the earth and its peoples and our relationship to them. None of these contexts is insignificant, and each of them requires a reshaping of this life we call religious—a prophetic attempt to live wholeheartedly as icons with direct openings to the sacred through which others may enter. We are called in unprecedented ways to be fully American in our living of religious life, fully Christian, fully emancipatory of ourselves and other women, fully multi-cultural, fully ecclesial, and fully ecological. Religious life has not consolidated in its new form because all of the larger contexts affecting it remain as yet incoherent. This is the time to trust the "Fiery Spirit, fount of courage, life within life of all that has being." We, along with everyone else, are to be remade.

Preliminary Observations on The Forus Study

Before I address the specific challenges pointed to in these contrapuntal forces, I want to make five preliminary observations about the FORUS Study and its conclusions, although the complete data is not yet available. First, I found some curious omissions in the organizing framework of the survey instrument. There were virtually no questions in the instrument which allowed an integrated description of the dynamic inter-relationship of shared charism, experience of God, personal history and gifts, and the way belonging to an apostolic congregation empowers a life of apostolic service. I am describing an internalized consciousness in each of us as well as a set of concretely structured relationships with a congregation and its members. Because the external manifestations of this structure have changed so markedly, we find it difficult to make its internal coherence "visible." Because the study covered all forms of religious life for both men and women, the old juridical categories assumed by the questions seemed inadequate to express the new experience of apostolic religious life for women.

**... one is only prophetic when
protest, denunciation, lament,
and vision are rooted in
the mystical impulses
of the fiery spirit.**

Secondly, conclusions of this study suggested some tensions between the prophetic and contemplative poles of religious life.⁷ The last thirty years has reclaimed and released the prophetic charism of religious life, a dormant, dangerous memory. Contemplation and prophecy are not necessarily polar opposites. Rather I assume a unity between the mystical and the prophetic. One can be prophetic by parabolic action, by simply living differently. One can be prophetic by social criticism, social analysis, and political activism. But one is only prophetic when protest, denunciation, lament, and vision are rooted in the mystical impulses of the fiery spirit. Further, according to Walter Brueggemann, every ministry can have a prophetic dimension regardless of its social or institutional location.⁸

Third, apostolic religious women were not questioned about feeling a call to ordained ministry. Historically, apostolic religious life has remained significantly different for men and women. The constraints imposed by church and society upon women regarding ministries, leadership, and relationship to the world are essentially sexist. Apostolic life for

women has never meant the same autonomy, freedom, flexibility, or acceptance as it has for monastic, mendicant, or apostolic men; nor does it yet.

As long as the church refuses to resolve the question of women's full participation in leadership in the church, I do not think we will be able to separate the distinctiveness of apostolic religious life for women from ordained ministry. I think a significant but probably small percentage of our members have always been called to ordained ministry. Could this contribute to the strong tendency to parochial assimilation which both the LCWR Ministry Study and the Forus Study question? There are complex reasons why religious women experience confusion about our role in church and society. We are still trying to do a new thing as fully apostolic women.

Fourth, some of the questions on spirituality seemed poorly conceived. Activities ranging from visiting the sick or helping the poor to exercising aerobically or resting in contemplative prayer were presented in terms of how they contributed to spiritual or personal fulfillment. This question was asked in an individualistic way. Where were the questions about what sacrifices or disciplines religious embrace in order to be contemplative and to respond to their mission? Or what activities sustain commitment, nourish them spiritually, or give meaning to their lives?

Fifth, I found the questions on Jesus unconnected to the content of that Christology—how an experience of Jesus leads to specific forms of mission. One question probed whether one's belief in Jesus was stronger or weaker now than on entrance. The other concerned the frequency of feeling at one with God or Christ. Major developments in christology, new understandings of the humanity of Jesus and of his ministry have had a major effect on our spirituality. The experience of Jesus in a fully apostolic spirituality looks to Jesus' own ministry as a guide for how to be in ministry. There we discover God's compassion for the poor and marginalized. In addition, liberation christologies, including feminist ones, emphasize that Jesus suffered a political death precisely because he refused to accept the injustice embedded in the religious and social institutions of his day. Jesus is not so much one's Lord and master to whom one gives obedience by accepting the superior's decisions as he is the animating source of compassion, energy, and love. Obedience is listening and responding to this call wherever it takes us.

Further there is an experience of Jesus which happens in and through ministry itself, a face of Jesus revealed in the poor—the compassion of Christ which is received as women respond in compassion to the needs of others. This kind of religious experience, the felt simultaneity of love of God and love of neighbor, is at the heart of apostolic religious life. When ministry is a selfless expression of love, love is constantly circulating among caring people and God. The

"Caring People" part of the Nygren/Ukeritis study discovered this kind of operative christology. Caring people do not burn out because their altruistic care for others returns to them in reciprocal caring, and God is experienced in and through all of it. I believe we are challenged to ask one another such christological questions. How has our religious experience changed or developed in the light of these major shifts in christology during these years of renewal? How many christologies are operative in our members and how do we support the on-going conversion implied when the Christ mystery takes on new dimensions mystically and ministerially?"

The Challenges

With these observations, what then are the salient challenges posed by the research? Together the studies add up to formidable challenges as well as offering cause for hope. Although I use the contrapuntal forces identified in the Forus Study as an organizing framework, I am including data from the other studies.

Individualism versus Vocational Commitment

Nygren and Ukeritis challenge us to examine ourselves on the extent to which individualism in U.S. culture may be undermining vocational commitment. In this challenge, they link individualism, cultural assimilation, and the democratization of authority. They insist that religious close the gap between espoused and operative values evident in the life and work of religious. They focus this discrepancy on the number of religious who feel no personal commitment to realize the preferential option for the poor, little commitment to congregational vocation and mission, and a reliance on "inner authority" rather than obedience or discernment in relationship to the congregation. They tend to place the "high cost" of gospel living with direct ministry to the poor, a more communal, less individualistic life-style, and stronger links through authority to congregational mission.

Option for the Poor

Striking differences exist between the Forus Study, the LCWR Ministry Study, and the Brookland Commission Papers on the extent to which religious actually espouse a preferential option for the poor. The Forus study interprets the response rate of 37% who feel no commitment to work with the poor as a serious problem of credibility for religious life. By contrast, the LCWR Ministry Study found that 88% of the communities have practices or policies that allow for uncompensated ministry with the materially poor. This is clearly a response of the communities to place corporate resources at the service of the poor. Secondly, 30% reported the creation of new not-for-profit corporations as a way of sponsoring a new ministry. In the ministry trends over the last ten years, LCWR Ministry Study reports a shift from ministry

with the middle-class to ministry with the poor. The opportunity to work with the poor was also among the top ten criteria influencing ministry choices, along with compatibility with charism. The Brookland Commission in a much smaller sample also found a stronger commitment to the poor than did the Forus Study. 88.5% considered a fundamental option for the poor either crucial or quite important to religious life. In the same study on 27% indicated their choice of ministry was not influenced by a commitment to work directly with the poor.

The discrepancy among these studies requires further study. Is leadership misinterpreting the extent to which the option for the poor is espoused by membership? No question in any of the studies asked for the degree of support members felt for corporate decisions in the use of investments, subsidizing ministry with the poor. No question addressed ways in which sisters not working directly with the materially poor were committed to this value through less direct means, such as education, advocacy, or research. Finally, the LCWR Ministry study confronts us with the fact that although we espouse the value of systemic change as an important way of helping the poor, only 335 sisters are currently involved full-time in advocacy and social change out of 49,105 active religious women. Conversion is perhaps still underway in this important area.

Cultural Assimilation Feminism

Let us look at the challenge of cultural assimilation which encompasses not only individualism and the democratization of authority, but materialism, consumerism, feminism, and professionalism as well. As a result of the women's movement, the spheres of activity available to us outside the structures of the church and our congregations have expanded. There are signs of hope in our recognition of and response to internalized sexism in ourselves, our community structures and attitudes, as well as in external environments.

The Brookland Commission Survey¹⁰ instrument presented a complex and multi-faceted analysis of the influence of feminism on the intellectual life of women religious. Two-thirds of the respondents are impatient with the progress on women's issues in U.S. society and three fourths with progress in the church. Three fourths believe their congregations supported feminist attitudes and values, and also find them in accord with their way of thinking. 37% say it is difficult to be a feminist and a practicing member of the Catholic Church, and two-thirds support the ordination of women. For many of us, the extent to which feminism is being espoused by us may sound like good news, and it is! However, there is also potential for women's communities to become unnecessarily polarized over these issues. Some sisters remain severely

threatened by the word, "feminism." Others continue to claim they have never been oppressed as women. For these, denial serves to reduce internal conflict, protect a less conflictual way of being ecclesial, and assists accommodation to patriarchal culture in work environments.

As communities of women, we have multiple understandings about the meaning of feminism, and the specific changes in language, practice, and worship desirable in ecclesial contexts. We espouse varying analyses of women's situations within feminist schools of thought. There are a significant number of women in our communities who do not grasp the significance of gender analysis for the full empowerment of ourselves as women, for our commitment to all women, as well as to poor women. Since the majority of women's congregations founded between the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries generally espoused some special concern for women, it seems impossible to reappropriate these charisms today without taking feminist analysis into account. Further, according to Maria Riley in her Brookland Commission Paper, religious women should be contributing the rich social teaching of the church as well as a Christian feminist reading of the gospel to secular feminism.¹¹ Thus the challenge is for us to become both more conscious and more critical in explicitly working with our communities on feminist issues and in appropriating feminism through the liberating strands of Christian tradition.

A distinct yet related challenge appears in the research related to the acceptability of lesbian candidates in women's communities. The Forus Study found women expressed considerable uncertainty about policy, attitudes, or experiences, as compared to men. It would seem women religious as a whole are simply not openly dealing with lesbian issues in a significant way.

Professionalization and Work-Absorption

A second source of concern in relationship to cultural assimilation is the professionalization of our ministries and a tendency to work-absorption versus the communal and contemplative dimension of religious life. U.S. religious life has always been work-absorbed. Religious women work hard and get the job done—whatever job they do. With the relinquishment of congregationally-owned or operated institutions, it is increasingly difficult for leaders to direct their personnel to specific ministries and to create new institutions to meet new needs. We need to continue to ask ourselves the question, "In the service of what goals do we spend our lives and congregational resources?" "What are the hidden institutional, perhaps even self-centered goals, sisters may unwittingly be serving in our ministerial lives?" The LCWR Ministry Survey challenges us to develop a new form of corporateness which would allow us to focus ministry in significant ways and sustain initiatives in the future.

In addition, we are also challenged anew to maintain an alternative life-style in the face of the corporate cultures of our work sites which discourage a contemplative rhythm of work and prayer, simplicity of life and relationships with both friends and community members. Many of us work excessively, neglecting participation in community events, time for retreat or renewal, and shared communal life. The rewards of a sense of achievement, self-importance, and financial gain for uncritically assimilating the 60-80 hour work week of professional life in this culture and an escalation of consumerism related to "keeping up" with professional life are difficult to resist. Yet there is also the less obvious communal reality of our pooling of economic resources and shared responsibility for the community. To what extent, as leaders and as members, do we support one another in the difficult choices required to resist the trends toward work absorption and materialism? At the same time do we also support our women in making their best contributions to their professional fields? And do we positively foster contemplative and community values?

The Forus Study showed that for many religious their professional identity offers greater role clarity than does their identity as religious.

The Forus Study showed that for many religious their professional identity offers greater role clarity than does their identity as religious. It remains a challenge for members and leaders to resist the tendency to derive our sense of self more from our professional identity than from our identity as religious, who are also in many cases professionals.

Role Clarity and Vocations

The current confusion over the role of religious in both church and society is a natural consequence of institutions in the process of transformation. Women considering a religious vocation receive little encouragement from their families, peers, clergy or laity. If it isn't necessary to live simply, celibately, or in relationship to community to engage in ministry or to be of service to the church and society, why embrace religious life? While the Forus Study challenges us to become clearer about our identity, life-style, and mission, we are not responsible for the massive changes in church and society which contribute to our invisibility and the lack of social support for our life-style. Few, even in the church, grasp the core values of religious life apart from the useful role we played as a work

force in church institutions. The Forus Study indicates that young people continue to exhibit generosity and dedication. However, we may be underestimating the need for education about religious life and our need to foster support actively from the larger community for religious life to be an attractive option. The Forus Study indicated that religious feel that they alone are responsible for shaping religious life. In every other historical period, communities recognized the need to accommodate themselves to the attitudes of hierarchy and society in order to sustain membership. What is the gap between our self-understanding and the way we are perceived that we need to address more directly?

Adult Development and Individualism

Although I do not argue that we are uninfluenced by strong currents of individualism, I believe we need to confront this challenge as a developmental issue as well as a cultural one. Developmental psychologists tell us that the majority of the adult population in the United States can be placed at the conformist stage or lower. The change process in religious life has compelled psychological development in many of our members. Conformist personalities once were a good fit in religious life. Today our communities are populated by some women who are still dependent, others who are becoming independent and who are not yet ready for interdependence, and still others who desire to place their autonomy at the service of communal life and congregational mission in mature interdependence. These differences in psychological and spiritual development pose significant challenges to us for recruitment, life-style, the exercise of authority, and congregational mission.¹²

Individualism and Community

In terms of life-style, the issue of community remains the great conundrum. Many women are fully and passionately engaged in ministries which feel significant, are deeply connected to the community's charism, and offer an appropriate arena in which sisters exercise their considerable gifts. However, some long for a less isolated life either living a more explicitly shared life of prayer, theological reflection, and bonded relationship or some what new, less routine ways of sharing the charism and spiritual orientation which originally drew them to community. I believe if we are to address the pressing need in U.S. culture for communities with members who have developed beyond dependency and dysfunction, we may well need to reduce the levels of our professional involvements. This is a tremendous challenge since most of our current members carry deep wounds from having foolishly invested energy in dysfunctional living groups and are reluctant to experience a diminishment of ministerial effectiveness again. Such decisions require careful discernment, interior freedom, and the

capacity to make the necessary sacrifices for the sake of a greater good.

Differing Interpretation of Authority

The Forus Study states: "authority in religious life, as in the church itself, is perhaps the most pressing question for religious to resolve."¹³ There are differing interpretations of authority and leadership which inhibit the ability of leaders to focus the energies of their congregations. Further, Nygren and Ukeritis found that women religious experienced greater difficulty with obedience than with any other of the vows. Women have been deeply wounded by abuses of authority. We are challenged to heal the wounds of authority in our personal and communal past even as we learn to exercise authority within a community of adult disciples. This is pioneering ground and its resolution is perhaps the greatest gift we could offer the ecclesial community. It remains problematic, however, that our interpretations of authority differ within the same congregation. These variations impede the ability of leaders to lead and make it difficult to hold members accountable to a more nuanced understanding of obedience.

Affiliative Decline versus Role Clarity

The Forus Study emphasized the factor of affiliation. The researchers found that members of religious orders exhibited a stronger need for affiliation than for mission. This they interpreted negatively since new members are attracted primarily by the purpose or mission. Due to the current lack of clarity about the distinctiveness of religious life, the benefits and satisfaction of belonging to a congregation seem to assume greater importance than shared commitment. This interpretation puzzled me. In the absence of clarity about our place in church and society, women, at any rate, seem to be intent on re-shaping their communities on the basis of new interpretations of the charism arising in their members. This communal discernment requires an entirely new level of bonding, entrusting one's sense of self and unique expression of charism to one another. There remains the reality that together an institute is more than the individual ministries of its members. But in the absence of corporate institutions expressing that charism, a congregation's purpose and mission can be less visible. Are these stages in a process, with deeper bonding followed by a new corporateness in the expression of charism, or a form of defense and denial?

Multiculturalism

This intensity of affiliation suggests that it may be increasingly difficult to bring new members into a group that is already too formed in its relationships with one another to admit newer members. The challenge to multiculturalism is imperative here as well. The Forus Study suggests that communities are insuf-

ficiently critical of their internalized racism and inhospitality to women from non-white cultures. We are challenged not only to accommodate women in varying stages of psychological development, but to welcome the different gifts that women from non-white cultures could bring to us. We must be willing to allow our community cultures to be changed by them.

Challenges from Ministry Trends

The LCWR Ministry Study describes a virtual explosion in ministries among women religious. It portrays tremendous energy and involvement in ministry. The survey itself discovered that whole new categories of ministry were emerging through the response of women religious to unmet social needs. Of the one thousand women who could not find their category of ministry in the survey, 10% were engaged in prison ministry, and the remainder in giving retreats direction and spiritual direction. Leadership expected increases to occur in the ministries of spiritual direction and retreat work. This study also found that women religious were looking to one another for partnership in collaboration in the future. Yet, what are the obstacles we still need to overcome that impede our ability to collaborate?

Congregational Ministry versus Individual Ministry

The Forus Study reported a new willingness of members to participate or live in community-sponsored institutions. The study suggests that greater potential may now exist for members to contribute their work to congregationally-sponsored projects than in the recent past. However, at the same time, the LCWR Ministry Study discovered that individual sisters rather than congregational planning are responsible for identifying new ministries. Leaders and members together are challenged to develop new ways for gathering and directing this energy toward common goals that are prophetic, compelling and compassionate.¹⁴

Skillful leadership and changes in structures and processes will be required to strengthen a sense of shared purpose and mission and better focus the personnel resources of each community. Is housing such a clear focus of corporate attention because it is a more pressing need than others, or because skillful leadership has effectively influenced this response?

Declining Emphasis on the Quality of Intellectual Life

There is concern expressed from several sources about some of the shifts taking place in ministries and their effects on religious. The Brookland Commission is concerned that with the shift away from educational ministries, there is little planning or support for the ongoing educational development of members. Secondly, there seems potentially to be a loss of appre-

ciation for the role of critical thought and the intellectual life in promoting social change or developing coherent, operative theory.

Other Trends

Other Major trends identified by the LCWR Ministry Study were the shift away from work with children to work with adults, from ministry in sponsored works to non-sponsored ones, from institutionally-based ones to non-institutionally-based ones, and from church-related services to non-church-related ones. This diffusion appears to have the potential of weakening the societal influence exerted by the institutions which we owned or sponsored. Which institutions ought we seek to preserve and which relinquish? Are there new ones we should be creating?

Parochial Assimilation

Finally, the overall trend toward parochial assimilation remains strong. The LCWR Ministry Survey projected increases in parish ministry by 1996. More women expect to be parish administrators and more involved in the ordinary pastoral ministry of the church despite the lack of funding for these positions and the discriminatory difficulties experienced in full-time parochial ministry. In what ways does the intensive involvement of religious in diocesan or parochial ministry compromise the freedom and flexibility of their responding from the unique charism and the more prophetic dimensions of religious life? What tensions between the needs of the local church and fidelity to congregational charisms will need to be negotiated?

Conclusion

The challenge remains for us to determine the uniqueness of our contribution to ecclesial life, give greater direction to our ministerial choices, and to assess more critically the long-term effects of our choices. The clock is running out. We are aging very rapidly. Some communities will decline and die, others may revive if we manage to face the challenges before us. This is simply what it means to be living through a transitional time of major paradigm change. Yet these are not times without hope. Despite the depth of the challenges which the research and our larger context present to us, there are also sparks of light, signs of the fiery spirit in these same studies and in our experience. There is tremendous interest in the future of religious life evidenced by the amount of recent research. Current members of religious institutes are strongly committed to this way of life and to their communities. Many communities are energized by a renewed understanding of their charisms, and charism functions as a criterion influencing a wide range of decisions.

There appears to be fresh energy and creativity in leadership, especially among outstanding leaders.

There is fresh vision for the future emerging from multiple sources. There is evidence of profound experience of God and an explosion of ministerial creativity and variety that issue from the unity of love of God and love for others. There is commitment to serve the poor among leadership, through use of congregational resources. And there is evidence of health and vitality in some communities. The sparks are in the embers. Will we help fan them into flame?

These are times to trust the fiery spirit since religious life is, after all, a work of this energizing, loving fullness of God's graciousness. We are called in fidelity to trust and respond to the spirit within and around us. To return to Hildegard—the spirit is the highest and fiery power, “who kindled every living spark and breathed out nothing that can die. She flames above the beauty of the fields, shines in the waters; in the sun, the moon and the stars, she burns. And by means of the airy wind, she stirs everything into quickness with a certain invisible life which sustains all. She, the fiery power, lies hidden in these things and they blaze from her.”¹⁵

Footnotes

1. John of the Cross reserves this poetic metaphor for the completion phase of the transforming union of the soul with God. “The Living Flame” in *Collected Works of John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1979).
2. “O Ignis Spiritus Paracliti,” (Sequence for the Holy Spirit), trans. Barbara Newman in *Saint Hildegard of Bingen: Symphonia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 149.
3. Anne Munley, *Threads for the Loom, LCWR Planning and Ministry Studies*. (Silver Spring, Md: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1992).
4. David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis, “The Religious Life Futures Project: Executive Summary” to be called FORUS in future publications, *Review for Religious* 52 (January-February 1993) 6-55.
5. These studies were funded by the Lilly Endowment and are focused on the intellectual life of women religious including the significance of feminism. Principal researchers

are: Maria Riley, Mary Frohlich, Karen Kennelly, and Katarina Schuth. A survey instrument was used that measured some of the effects of feminism on religious life, questions about the intellectual life, and attitudes and practices related to continuing education for women religious.

6. *Final Report to Lilly Endowment, Inc.: Evaluation of Grants for Research and Education of Roman Catholic Religious Communities*. John Grindel and Sean Peters, Project Directors, begun in 1990 and published 1991 or 1992. Among the grants studied were: the Brookland Commission Study, the Nygren/Ukeritis Study, Quinonez and Turner's Study, as well as others.

7. In conclusions on vocation, Forus suggests religious are currently more contemplative than prophetic if prophetic is identified with the preferential option for the poor. Forus, 46. Grindel and Peters assert in their conclusions that “Nygren and Ukeritis believe that we are witnessing today a swing of the pendulum towards an emphasis on the mystical aspect of religious life away from a prophetic emphasis.” 84.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 109-113.

9. The introduction to *Threads for the Loom* describes the elements of the new paradigm of religious life without making explicit how they might be a specific interpretation of the gospel and one's discipleship.

10. Katerina Schuth, “The Intellectual Life as a Value for Women Religious in the United States,” *Brookland Commission Study* with appendix including the survey on Women Religious and the Intellectual Life. This survey asked questions on feminism in the context of the intellectual life. For purposes of oral delivery, in some cases percentages have been rounded off to rough fractions.

11. “The Significance of Feminism for the Intellectual Life of Women Religious,” *Brookland Commission Study*, July 1992. See also her *Transforming Feminism*.

12. *The Final Report to the Lilly Endowment* cited above emphasizes these developmental issues more than the Forus Study and notes its importance. See also Elizabeth M. Liebert, *Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction*. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992) for an accessible discussion of adult development.

13. Forus, 46.

14. The Forus Study underscores this challenge as well.

15. *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works with Letters and Songs*, ed. Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1987) 11-12.

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Spirituality for Leadership in a Changing Church

Virginia Farnan, R.S.M.

Presentation originally made to Bishop John McGann and the Major Superiors of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, on September 20, 1993.

It is my pleasure and privilege to join you this morning and to have this opportunity to reflect with you on the Spirituality for Leadership in a Changing Church. At one point, when I was reflecting upon the topic, a feeling of extreme well-being came over me, and I remembered one line from a poem. The poem was about the life of a priest and it ended, "What a life! And it's all yours, O priest of God!" I thought to myself, "Virginia, what a life! And it's all yours, O loved of God!" My dear friends, ours is a wonderful life! Ours is a wonder-filled life because we have been called, by our vocation as women and men religious, to a life whose very purpose is our union with God. We are Loved of God!

Union with God—this is the heart of our spirituality, and the heart of our spirituality as leaders.

Union With God

Union with God—this is the heart of our spirituality, and the heart of our spirituality as leaders. Yes, all Christians are called to union with God, but our life, our religious life in community, has as its prime purpose the fostering of our life of union with God—for ourselves, for one another and for all of earthlife! I have often thought this missing from what we call our "vocation advertising." You know the secret of our life as well as I do. Is it because we're shy Irish that we don't talk about this extreme intimacy to which we are called? Union with God—this is the treasure we hold. It is not some far-off goal. You know it and I know it. We have experienced our union with God. It is our common bond.

We know with that deep knowing—God, dwelling in our hearts and souls. God, dwelling in every fiber of our being. We know with a clear perceptive knowing—God, revealing God's self as dwelling in the poor, the homeless, the ravaged earth, the mute and unspoken-for of our society and of our Church.

To prepare for this presentation, I searched many authors for definitions of spirituality. All of them revealed a glimmer of what I consider our spirituality, a spirituality of union with God. Of all the definitions I read, however, the following from Paul's letter to the Colossians seemed to me the most appropriate to bring to you today:

You will understand that since we heard about you, we have never missed you in our prayers. We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from God's point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding. We also pray that your outward lives, which others see, may bring credit to God's name, and that you may bring joy to God's heart by bearing genuine Christian fruit and that your knowledge of God may grow deeper.

As you live this new life, we pray that you will be strengthened from God's boundless resources so that you will find yourselves able to pass through an experience and endure it with joy. ... Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God.

For we are ministers of the Church by divine commission, a commission granted to us for a special purpose: that we might fully declare God's Word—that Mystery which up to now has been hidden in every age and every generation, but which is now as clear as daylight to those who love God. They are those to whom God has planned to give a vision of the full wonder and splendor of God's secret plan for all nations. And the secret is simply this: Christ in you! Yes, God in you bringing with God's presence the hope of all the glorious things to come.

So, naturally we proclaim Christ! We proclaim God! We warn everyone we meet, and teach everyone we can, all that we know about God, so that, if possible, we may bring everyone up to her or his full maturity in Christ Jesus. This is what we are working at all the time, with all the strength God gives us.¹

Yes, my dear friends, the secret is simply this: Christ God in us! This is the core of the spirituality to which we are called, and our religious life offers us and all who come to our communities the opportunity to develop this relationship, this mystery. A long time ago I read that "Religious life isn't something, it's someone," and I am here to attest, after 46 years, that this is true and it is wonderful.

So naturally we proclaim Christ. We warn everyone we meet, and teach everyone we can all that we know about Christ so that if possible, we may bring everyone up to her or his full maturity in Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, religious life has as an essential environment—community life. We develop our life of

union with God with other women and/or men who are publicly committed by vow to the same priority. We do not have to guess at one another's reason for being. We know. We have the great comfort and support of knowing that each member of our community has God as her or his reason for choosing to be in community with us. The very word community implies a choice of union.

And who is the God with whom we are in union? Paul reminds us, "The secret is simply this, God in you." Yes, God present in me, God present in others, God in Eucharistic presence, and God revealing the divine presence in all earthlife.

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.²*

... that the essence of religious life is our life of union with God, which began at baptism, and which we all must be urged and encouraged to appreciate, cherish and bring to full maturity.

Therefore, I would present to you that a spirituality for leadership is to bring focus to this truth continually: that the essence of religious life is our life of union with God, which began at baptism, and which we all must be urged and encouraged to appreciate, cherish and bring to full maturity. There is no meaning to our presence for the Church in the world without union with God as our central and known reason for being. Therefore, bringing focus to the meaning of religious life is one of the first responsibilities you must consciously address in your ministry of leadership.

Personal Spirituality

I encourage you, my dear sisters and brothers, and I cannot emphasize this enough, to give the necessary time to your own spiritual maturation. Contemplation and reflection are essential to you. They feed your soul and fill you with the awareness of God present to you. Just for this moment consider, contemplation is not you contemplating God, it is God contemplating you. The gaze of God is always upon you, hovering over you, burning within you. Contemplation means that you put yourself in contact with God, allow yourself to experience the power of God's gaze.

The practice of reflection is our second way of

becoming more conscious of being those loved of God. Reflection takes place in our cars, at meetings when we are bored, when we are waiting for something to begin, before we go to bed at night. Reflection is using sacred scripture or a spiritual reading to deepen our awareness of God's presence to us during the day. We, who spend so much time giving the presence of God to others have to take time to absorb that God gave God's presence and love to us so often during the day.

Today, let us reflect on the graciousness of God loving us through our sister and brother, Regina and Patrick [Vicars for Religious], who prepared this day for us. God loving us through the hospitality of Bishop McGann who wanted us to spend this time with him. God loving us through the hidden people who prepare our meals, put gas in our cars. Yes,

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*

A spirituality for leadership which calls us to spiritual maturation, urges us to call others to the same, so that we may lead all to full maturity in God. These words may sound medieval, but the path is still a true one. The route, the way to spiritual maturation is still the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive way.

In her excellent book, *The Path to No-Self: Life at the Center*, Bernadette Roberts aptly describes a journey we can all recognize.

"Purgative?" you ask.

Those of us who have taken life's struggles head on, and who, either through therapy or a reflective struggle, have been purged or freed of our immature self-centeredness, seeing ourselves as the center of our world, understanding our little regressions into childhood behaviour.

We have experienced the purgative way. We have worked through our childhood responses to authority and other stimuli. We recognize these responses now, and know they are "little regressions" which we must not act upon because they get in the way of God being present to others through us.

We have experienced illumination. We know by our inner experience that God is the center of all creation, including our self-creation. This illumination brings new meaning to our entire vision of ourselves, others, our mission for the Church, and for all of earth-life. This illumination is of course, that:

The secret is simply this, God in us. Yes, God in us, bringing with God's presence insight into all the glorious things to come.

Such an illumination, of course, brings us to the understanding of the unitive way, that we are never alone, that the presence of God is as much an integral part of our being as is our blood and our breathing.

Bernadette Roberts tells us, "The longer we live in the unitive state, the more ordinary it becomes. After many years," she writes, "we look back and see that the transforming process has actually been a process of human maturation. We see too, that without realizing an abiding oneness with God, no human being can be regarded as authentically mature."⁴

So naturally we proclaim Christ. We warn everyone we meet, and teach everyone we can all that we know about Christ, so that if possible, we may bring everyone up to her or his full maturity in Christ Jesus.

Our spiritual maturity is ever evolving, Bernadette Roberts reminds us. We do not go through our own purgation, illumination and unification with God just once, but many times, and our experience of God deepens and deepens and deepens. Further she tells us that "the unitive state ... our oneness with God, is a hidden path in itself ... this hidden path ... into mystery ... for this state of union with God is the prime state of selfhood, of wholeness and integration, which gives rise to our most productive years because God's energy, which creates this union in us, never tires, never wanes and continually moves us outward beyond the self."⁴

Unfortunately, I have to stop here and move on. I would like to spend more time reflecting on this journey, because I think emphasizing it is so important to our ministry of leadership for the Church, and the members of our religious communities, and for those who will be encouraged to come to this wonderful environment of the community of men and women loved of God.

Corporate Spirituality

I have just touched upon the concepts of our individual spirituality for leadership and the encouragement and enthusiasm we must communicate to our members and co-members in their spiritual maturation. I feel a bit remiss because I have just scratched the surface. However, I am impelled by the energy of God within me to explore briefly the concept of corporate spirituality for leadership in a changing Church.

Religious communities are the charismatic, changing and challenging element in the Church. Religious communities are at the heart of the Church, where the spirit of God stirs up change, challenge and, of course, trouble. Trouble, because the institutional Church has as its responsibility to preserve the ultimate truths of God's revelation. It has structured itself, over the centuries, in a hierarchical model based on Roman government in which all authority is held by the head of the government and not shared. This model of government was appropriate in a time of a mostly uneducated populous and inadequate communication. In our era, in which most people are educated and in which there is rapid communication which brings in its wake

rapidly changing situations, this model of government has its inadequacies, because the variety of applications of the immutable truths to local situations requires immediate decision-making by all the participants, especially those most involved in the situation.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law reminds us that we are apostolic religious congregations. Canon 607 begins by saying: "Religious life, as a consecration of the whole person, manifests in the Church a wonderful union brought about by God, a sign of the future age." Note, then, that our corporate spirituality for the Church must be a sign of the future age. This can bring us the experience of what I call "trouble." The preservation efforts of the institutional Church and the "signs of the future age" reflected by the prophetic or charismatic responsibilities of religious communities, cause conflict, dismissal, censure and other forms of alienation. It is well to remember that the excess of preservation is repression, and the excess of charismatic is the esoteric. Both extremes are excusatory.

While the ecclesial effects are often painful and very sad, we must remember that each component of our Church is expressing its own leadership role. Hopefully, and perhaps only in retrospect, will we be able to see the wisdom of preservation and the movement of charism bringing about the reign of God in our universe.

Canon 674 brings to focus the responsibility of religious institutes in a changing Church. Apostolic Religious Institutes are those in which apostolic action pertains to the very nature of the institute. The very nature of a religious institute is its charism in mission. Notice I do not say charism and mission, but rather charism in mission, because the charism of an apostolic religious institute is made visible in its mission.

... the charism of the Institute of Mercy is mercy.

While the discussion of a corporate spirituality should justly be given more time, let me make these essential points. Our membership should be encouraged to see not just their individual actions, but their individual actions as comprising the corporate actions of our communities, as revealing our charism in mission. For example, the charism of the Institute of Mercy is mercy. We reveal this charism of mercy through our mission of service to the poor, sick and to those who are ignorant of the causes of poverty and sickness. Therefore, our charism in mission is to reveal the mercy of God by serving the poor, sick and ignorant. The purpose of our corporate structures is to reveal our charism in mission. Our elected leaders are called to give continual focus to this responsibility for

the Church. Our structures of government, our community life, our living poverty, chastity and obedience must enable us to reveal the mercy of God through our service. They must enable us to come to the spiritual maturity of becoming the mercy of God ourselves. They must enable us to reveal this mercy to the poor, sick and to the ignorant. They must enable us to take their place in the forums of the world that oppress the poor, cause sickness, and institutionalize ignorance.

This is true of the corporate spirituality of all religious communities. The Dominicans must give this same corporate witness to revealing God as truth by their praise, by their preaching, and by incarnating God's blessing. Corporately, the Sisters of St. Joseph are called to reveal the community of the great love of God by healing, redeeming and liberating all people, especially the poor and oppressed.

Maria Augusta Neal, SND, in commenting on apostolic religious congregations after her survey of them, succinctly states the spirituality for leadership to which we are called. She said:

Apostolic women and men do not hear the voice of God on the mountain. They hear the cry of God in the streets, and go to the mountain to reflect with the word of God, in order to return to the cry they hear in our streets.

My dear sisters and brothers, this is what we are about all the time. Spirituality for leadership calls you continually to maturation with God. It calls you, and you are to call your membership, to be your charism for the changing world. Our corporate spirituality means that we stand with our members when they take the place of the poor in the arenas of the world. It means that every letter, every memorandum, every decision you make with your members is to reveal your charism to them, and enable them to come to their full maturity in God.

You are called to give leadership to adults who are well on their way in union with God. You are called to a leadership that gives focus and emphasis to your charism in mission. The new age is an age of adulthood. Adulthood requires shared decision-making, respect for the choices of others, flexibility for rapid change. Spiritual adulthood, spiritual maturity requires purgation which releases the ego from its infantile behaviours and patterns. We can then take the risks that leadership in this changing world requires.

The changing world engages in small wars for economic gain, often engineered under the name of religion. Dominicans are called to preach this truth. Dominicans see the earth being ravaged for economic gain. One of their members was dismissed for bringing us to focus on the treasure of all earthlife. Dominicans should be in the forefront of the ecological movement.

Women are seeking fullness of life in Church and society. Women are the majority of the poor who are

economically oppressed. Mercies are called to participate in organizations, such as Network, the Center for Corporate Responsibility, the Women's Ordination Conference and the Emily List which lobby to relieve this oppression. To what focus is your charism calling you? Your corporate spirituality enables the church to see God's perception of the suffering world. Let me repeat the words of Maria Augusta Neal:

Apostolic women and men do not hear the voice of God on the mountain. They hear the cry of God in the streets, and go to the mountain to reflect with the word of God, in order to return to the cry they hear in our streets.

Our corporate spirituality calls you as leaders, and through you, your membership not only to "hear the cry of God in the streets" but to become that cry, to be so united with God, so in union with God, that people will see no longer you but the suffering God who cries in the street.

Dorothy Day gives us example of this and her corporate spirituality continues. Dorothy Day was not poor. Dorothy Day was not even for the poor. Dorothy Day was the poor. When we think of Dorothy Day we think of the poor and the homeless. Her very name causes us to hear the cry of God in our streets. Dorothy Day's union with God was so intense that she became the God who cried in our streets. Likewise, Catherine McAuley was the abused woman, the starving child, the uneducated Catholic. Catherine was an affront to the ignorant. Catherine McAuley was the cry of God in her streets.

My dear friends, you, as leaders, are the changing church. You, with your membership, are at the forefront of the church. You are the advance scouts, so to speak. You are in the streets. God sees the suffering through your eyes. Focus this God to your membership. Call the world, call the church leaders to this focus. Yes, and finally, spirituality for leadership requires two last things: a thick skin, but so translucent that God is revealed; and a sense of community that never lets the cry of God in your streets stand alone. Stand with your members who stand with the poor. Stand with the misunderstood. And why, why should you do all this? My friends, why not?

Footnotes

1. Adapted from *The New Testament in Modern English*, translated by J. B. Phillips (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958) Colossians 1:9-13, 15, 25-28.
2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Seventh Book, lines 821-824 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992).
3. Bernadette Roberts, *The Path to No-Self: Life at the Center* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991) xiii.
4. Roberts, 5.

Living in the Information Age

Rosemary Jeffries, RSM

Presentation originally given to the Regional Leadership Teams in September, 1993.

We live in a world where data and research on every possible topic abounds. Soon the "information highway" will make data available to us instantly. I wonder what this access to knowledge does to improve our way of life? And in my state of wonder I can still hear the warning from my childhood, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Maybe a lot of knowledge might be as dangerous as a little!

The information glut has not escaped religious life. We enjoy detailed knowledge of our past. Meanwhile recent studies describe our current reality and forecast the future, i.e. the LCWR Study of Ministry, by Anne Munley and "The Future of Religious Life Project" by Miriam Ukeritis and David Nygren. The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas adds specific data on population and ministry trends and projections for those of us in the Mercy community exploring our future together.

The information-rich environment of our time is an important context to consider in any conversation about our current and future reality . . .

These thoughts on living in an information age were offered to the leadership teams of the regional communities. They gathered in the fall of 1993 to consider the challenges of leadership at this time in religious life and to explore new ways to think about our future together as an Institute. The information-rich environment of our time is an important context to consider in any conversation about our current and future reality not only as religious but as women and as humans sharing a planet.

We live at a time when we might know more than what's good for us! For example, we live at a time when we know more about our own bodies through medical technology. Some of us have seen pictures of our lungs and bones, or watched the blood run through our body on a TV monitor. Catherine McAuley, the woman who continues to inspire the Mercy Community, managed to live and serve the sick poor without the medical knowledge we have. What does the added knowledge do for us — what does it mean for us? Does it lead us to a greater sense of wonder at the mystery and beauty of ourselves and others? Or does the knowledge make us anxious when we feel a

pain we can't explain. Or, are we challenged by the complexity of a medical system in need of reform?

We live at a time when we know more about the history of religious life, its current trends and some projections for the future. For example, *Threads for the Loom* provides us with a contemporary picture of religious life with particular attention to ministry. In this study Anne Munley highlights the ministry changes that we are experiencing, such as serving adults, moving away from sponsored works, service towards the materially poor, and movement towards non-church related service and non-institutionally based service.¹

Munley also suggests some future possibilities, including movement toward greater collaboration, the creation of new not-for-profit corporations to help with housing, and enhancement of programs for emerging lay leadership.²

Our knowledge of religious life is also augmented by the landmark study of Miriam Ukeritis and David Nygren, "The Future of Religious Life." They tell us that we have a ten-year window of opportunity. Ukeritis and Nygren point out some current realities that are cause for concern. Most disturbing among them is the "lack of role clarity" we experience as religious. They report that younger and more highly-educated members register the lowest "role clarity" as religious in this church and society.³ In the same study, however, the younger members register more interest in working with the poor, despite their lack of role clarity.⁴

Finally our very thorough knowledge of religious life at this time is enhanced by the specific data we have on the newly minted "Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas." The population projections suggest that we are in a "fast forward" motion of decline. Figures indicate that given the current trends for entrance, death and departure, by the year 2003, our numbers will be 4300, with about half of our membership 70-plus years. Efforts to attract new members should give us hope that our current decline does not predict doom. However, it seems even more important that our projections include the whole picture of what our growth trends suggest. For example, in the past five years, about 600 lay people have chosen to associate with the Mercy community. Growth might be happening in a new way.

Additionally, we know that we sponsor more than 125 health care facilities serving hundreds of people each day; that we teach thousands of children ranging from the retarded toddler to the college student. We are in more than 200 U.S. cities, 46 of the states and 25 countries. There are numerous emergency assis-

tance centers and out-reach projects that bear the Mercy name and render Mercy service.⁵ We also know the ministry of prayer by every member each day does more good than any of us can imagine.

What does our knowledge of religious life and our projections for the future do for us? What does it mean? Does it cause us to be more urgent even more urgent than Catherine who knew without the data sheets "that the poor need help today." Does the knowledge cause us to make bold decisions about how we will carry out the Direction Statement: "to commit our lives and our resources for the next four years to act in solidarity with the economically poor, especially women and children; women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society and one another as we embrace our multi-cultural and international reality."

Or does the added insight and data about religious life numb us into a place that is willing to wait until we study and research more in order to really understand?

We live at a time when we know the levels of violence that plague our cities and we know the levels of poverty that trap people in generational depression. We know the challenges of our society from daily stories and statistics reported in our newspapers, heard on radio and visually transmitted by television. We get constant reminders of the suffering in our society and world.

We know we are in an addicted culture, and that this undermines the development of a new generation of young people. We know that murder is one of the ten leading causes of death in our country. There is a violent crime every 17 seconds, a murder every 22 minutes, and children under five in this prosperous country called America are the most likely to suffer from poverty.

Catherine lived in 19th century Dublin amidst cultural injustices that challenged the poor. She lacked sophisticated data on poverty, and the instant analysis and constant commentary we have at our disposal. Yet, she directed her energies to certain issues and worked to change the systems of injustice. She was one woman making a difference in a society and church that questioned the abilities of women and the appropriate place for them. Catherine moved ahead full of confidence in God's providence.

Does the knowledge of our society with its violence and systemic oppression of the poor lead us to use our resources "to relieve misery and address its causes?" As women still not fully appreciated in our society and church, does our confidence in God's providence energize us to move ahead, facing systems of injustice squarely? Or does the knowledge overwhelm us and leave us wondering what can we do?

We live at a time when we know more about our universe, our planet earth and our human development than any other people in history. We know that the uni-

verse has a 15-billion-year history. We know that humankind, a very minute part of that evolutionary history, emerged with an innate desire to communicate and create. We know that in this history there have been more than 10 million species to inhabit the earth, but only 2 million continue today. Many species have perished at the hands of humans' surge toward development and progress.⁶

What does all of this knowledge and data about ourselves, our way of life, our contemporary society and our planet do for us?

We know that "memory" and consciousness are gifts that began with the tiniest of cells. We know too that tiny cells can share their memory. The DNA of each bacteria is not long enough to contain all memories vital to the evolution of new life. The learning of each new species is held by a "community" of cells.⁷ This information helps us to know that all of creation is connected. We are inter-related by the memories we hold for one another. It is the community that holds the memory. It is community that creates, discovers and learns.

Catherine lived without the knowledge of DNA. Perhaps her confidence in God came from an innate understanding that all of life is connected, and that there would be new Mercy DNA to extend her vision. What does this knowledge of a universe mean for us? Does it mean we live with consciousness of the wonderful story of creation, and see our responsibility to cherish all of creation? Are we mindful of our unusual place in the story of the universe? Do we have confidence in the Mercy DNA to follow us?

What does all of this knowledge and data about ourselves, our way of life, our contemporary society and our planet do for us? What does it mean? Robert Bellah, the sociologist who brought us *Habits of the Heart*, a critical look at the destructive elements of individualism makes a recommendation in his most recent book, *The Good Society*. "As the power of our ability to manipulate the world grows, the poverty of our understanding of what to do with that knowledge becomes more apparent."⁸ Do we suffer from that poverty of understanding? What shall we do with our knowledge?

Megatrends 2000, by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, echoes some of Bellah's sentiments. They, too, acknowledge our unique time in history. We are rich in knowledge and technology, but we are left wondering about the meaning of it all. They suggest

that "the most exciting breakthrough of the 21st century will occur not because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human."

Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, as well, conclude that "the greater problem is not the lack of data but in our capacity to understand the significance of the data that we already possess."¹⁰ They go on to say that the data has not been sufficiently assimilated to bring about a new period of comprehension of what it means to be human in our universe.

Do we live at a time when we know too much?

We do have unusual knowledge and data at our disposal. We share similarities with the sociologist, Bellah, with the marketing experts Naisbitt and Aburdene, and with the theologian, Berry, and cosmologists Berry and Swimme. We are asking what all this information means.

With the gift and privilege that our knowledge and access to information provides, we all need to be asking the questions of meaning. We cannot afford to get numbed or overwhelmed by the information. Rather, we need to take a leaf from Catherine's book and move forward with trust in God's providence and ask

the hard questions of ourselves.

What does it mean to be human, to be women, to be religious, to be Mercy? What does it mean in this time and in this place that we can know in so much detail?

Footnotes

1. Anne Munley, IHM, *Threads for the Loom*, (Washington, D.C., LCWR, 1991), 192.
2. *Ibid.*, 195.
3. Miriam Ukeritis, CSJ, and David Nygren, "Research Executive Summary: Future of Religious Orders in the United States," *Origins*, (Sept. 24, 1992), 263.
4. *Ibid.*, 264.
5. Statistics from the Institute Profile, 1993.
6. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1992), 140.
7. *Ibid.*, 91-2.
8. Robert Bellah, et. al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991), 44.
9. John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's* (New York: William Morrow and Company), 16.
10. Swimme and Berry, 21.

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Lineamenta on Consecrated Life

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM

Review of Purpose

The purpose of the draft or *Lineamenta* is to propose a statement on the nature, identity and purpose of consecrated life, so that the topic may be reflected on at the upcoming synod of bishops. The discussion process which precedes the 1994 synod is meant to help shape the agenda for that meeting, as well as identify "aspects of the topic which correspond to the pastoral needs of the Church for the future" (Preface). The intention is to involve clergy, religious and laity in the process of responding to the proposed questions (Preface). Readers are reminded of the number of official ecclesial documents on the consecrated life issued by the magisterium during the last decade (#4).

It is acknowledged that "many problems of the consecrated life today are a result of contact with and standing in opposition to the world of today" . . .

This document reflects a number of concerns. One is to present the magisterium as the provider of spiritual leadership and guidance, as an expression of its pastoral care for members of religious communities. It has previously reflected on the vocations of the laity (*Christifideles laici*), of priests (*Pastores dabo vobis*) and of women (*Mulieris dignitatem*). Another is to be realistic in articulating anew the meaning of the existence of consecrated religious life in *this* Church and in *this* world and *this* society (#3). It is acknowledged that "many problems of the consecrated life today are a result of contact with and standing in opposition to the world of today" with secular culture representing a cause for challenge and ambiguity (#3). A third concern is to realign religious life with the church's authority structure. In a number of places in the document, the connection between consecrated life and the institutional church emerges as matter of concern, implied by the directive that "consecrated life...ought to maintain its straining toward perfection within an increasingly close-knit ecclesial communion" (#3). The vision of the magisterium involves the hope that those living a consecrated life will "be able to express their organic community with the entire Church community and place their unique charismatic gifts at its service" (# 34).

Review of Content

The *Lineamenta* is divided into three sections. Part I is "The Nature and Identity of the Consecrated Life." It gives a survey of the foundational elements of consecrated life, including a brief description of the dynamic of consecration and mission, the evangelical counsels, and community life as a reflection of Church communion. It proposes as essential values renunciation of the world, Christo-centric and paschal dimensions of consecration, dedication to the service of the Lord in his Church, and unity of life in contemplation and action. It also outlines the practices that nurture spirituality. It acknowledges a variety of charisms and forms of life that are part of the Church's life and holiness, even though consecrated life does not belong to the hierarchy itself (#14). This particular section on charism (#14-17) is affirmative of the individual character of communities of consecrated life.

Part II, "Consecrated Life in the Church and in the World of Today," proposes to undertake "an objective discernment of the present situation" so that the hierarchy can give those in consecrated life "the necessary help to maintain the vibrancy of its life and works" (#25). After listing six areas in which positive results have come from the renewal encouraged by Vatican II, this section describes four negative aspects and proposes to inquire into their causes and recommend action be taken to treat them. These negative aspects include disorientation, individualism and secularism, dissent from the magisterium, and decline in numbers of vocations (# 28).

In addition, the document outlines "a few instances" of new situations in society which are nevertheless ambiguous in the effect they have on the living of consecrated life. These movements have promoted human good but at the same time had a compromising effect on consecrated life. They include national campaigns for human rights and democracy; movements toward political and economic equality which involve preferential commitment to the poor; the growth of vocations in developing countries which can't be translated into other cultures; the feminist movement, and general secularism and materialism which are at odds with the values proposed by consecrated life (#29).

Part III, "The Role of the Consecrated Life," spells out the implications of the ecclesial nature of consecrated life, and roots its emphasis in Vatican II and the vision of society, world, and church proposed in *Lumen gentium*. Those living consecrated life should be "experts in communion" (# 35). This communion with the church is characterized by a "special bond with the petrine ministry which ought to be con-

cretely manifested in a relationship of loving communion and obedience to the Roman Pontiff...This special relationship to the Holy Father of those living the consecrated life ought to be translated into a deep spiritual communion with his person, submission to his magisterium, total and ready acceptance of his directives and a generous cooperation in his ministry...."(#36). Likewise, there is envisioned a particularly close and organic relationship with the local and particular church (#40).

Those living consecrated life are challenged by a call to the new evangelization, a key concept which refers not only to the proclamation of the gospel, but to remaking the Christian fabric of society and promoting unity among the baptized (#43). This section concludes with a pastoral mandate (#44). Consecrated life, with its dedication to evangelization, should involve giving witness to God's love in the world, attention to young people, preferential choice for the poor, presence in culture as positive force in shaping and transmitting it, and defending gospel values in the world.

The conclusion of the document presents the Virgin Mary as the model for living the vows and the consecrated life itself. "Through the perfection with which she lived her virginity for the sake of the Kingdom, through her poverty, and total obedience to the plan of God, she is first among the Lord's disciples...(and) a resplendent model of apostolic and ecclesial service" (#45). The last remarks affirm the "basic unity arising from consecration and the extraordinary variety of charisms" (#46). The history of consecrated life in the history of the Church is assurance that the charisms of founders and foundresses will be carried into the third millennium as the "uninterrupted tradition of holiness" which reveals the face of Christ and works for the new evangelization (#47).

Commentary

There are several aspects of this document that mark its particular emphasis, and suggest what issues are informing its composition. A notable linguistic feature is the reference to "consecrated life" instead of religious life, religious community, vowed life or apostolic life. This connotes an action made upon the person rather than an action taken by a person. The emphasis here is not on the history of religious communities and their evolution, the creativity they have brought to the church, their contribution to needs of people unaddressed by secular or religious institutions, or their ministerial relation with laity.

The focus of the document reflects a selection of one theme from Vatican II — the ecclesial character of religious life. This is the major theme proposed as the theme for the present, post-renewal age. It is inspired by an effort to bring diversity into unity with the hierarchical church, both Papal and episcopal. It aims to consolidate the diversity represented by individuals

and their communities within the larger frame of the identity of the Church, particularly its organizational structure. Consequently, the communal character of religious life receives little attention. The charism of particular communities receives affirmation, but the tendency in this document is to make clear the subordination of charism to ecclesial structure. There seems to be less concern with reexamining consecrated life in light of the gospels evidenced by the fact that there are more citations of magisterial documents of the last decade than there are to the scriptures. It may be that such grounding in biblical theology, Christology and liturgical life is assumed to have been already articulated in previous documents. The theological grounding of the *Lineamenta* is supplied principally by previous papal documents and categories associated with ecclesiology.

The *Lineamenta* describes the overall purpose of religious life as serving the institutional Church's mission of evangelization.

The *Lineamenta* describes the overall purpose of religious life as serving the institutional Church's mission of evangelization. This ecclesial perspective is important because it differs from previous emphases, e.g., giving witness to the world, eschatological hope, being a call to holiness, being a response to a call to discipleship and the following of Jesus Christ, living of the vowed life, or responding to the needs of the world through the charism of the founder or foundress. Previously, the theological basis for religious life was grounded in the following of Jesus Christ as that is contemplated and preached in the gospel. The meaning of religious life as self-donation was associated with a sacramental theology of Eucharist. The meaning of the vows, communal life of charitable and supportive relationships, shared spirituality, liturgical prayer, corporate mission and apostolate, share in the community's charism as distinctive features of religious commitment have also been emphasized in the past. All these themes are subordinated in the present document to integration within the hierarchical structure of the Church and her mission of evangelization.

Contrasting voices in the document argue from two poles on the subject of charism. On one hand there is fidelity of community members to a founder or foundress' charism as a service to and renewal of the church's mission. On the other side, there is the hierarchical church which grounds a particular community's charism and mission to the world. The con-

clusion of the document, lauding individualizing charisms, also encodes this basic question. Does a founder or foundress' individualizing charism advance and rearticulate the mission of the Church, or does the Church "contain" or mandate that charism as part of its previously defined mission of evangelization? In describing the relation of consecrated life to the world, the document presents culture and social change as belonging to a context which bear more ambiguity than promise.

There is a contrast in Part II and the conclusion of Part III (#44c) on the issue of identification with the poor. Though the term "liberation theology" is not used, there seems to be a difference of opinion among the formulators of the *Lineamenta*. On one hand, Part II(#29 b) presents the matter of a preferential option for the poor less favorably as part of the "ambiguity and challenges of modern society" in which option for the poor leads to theological confusion. Part III (#44c) defends the choice more positively, and implies that preferential choice for the poor reflects the charisms of the apostolic life.

In the last thirty years women have passed through a variety of expressions of community life and actively contributed to its evolving style of governance.

Acknowledgment is made of the need to address consecrated life for women both because of the sheer number of women and because of the contributions they have made (#19a). Though the movement to advance women has had many beneficial results, it has also resulted in "a mistaken idea of feminism (that) has laid claim to the right to participate in the life of the Church in ways which are not in keeping with the hierarchical structure willed by Christ" (#29d). While this theme holds a minor place in the overall discourse of the document, the nature of women's experience of the consecrated life comprises a significant set of issues.

Simply by the fact that there are almost three times as many women as men living religious life in the world, the issues in this document have particular relevance to women. The matter of the document's "voice" is clearly an issue for women, just as it was in the efforts of U.S. Bishops to draft a pastoral letter on women. Especially significant as feedback will be answers to questions which have to do with women's experience of the consecrated life. Does this docu-

ment signal the end of the renewal generated by Vatican II, or its continuance?

In the last thirty years women have passed through a variety of expressions of community life and actively contributed to its evolving style of governance. They are taking initiative in the articulation of their own relation to the Church's organizational structure. They express their desire for dialogic forms of communication. They acknowledge changes in their theological perspective as a result of study, prayer and renewal. Their former reliance on the Church's sacramental ministry, particularly that of Eucharist, presents many practical difficulties presently because of a shortage of priests. Their vision of mission as women dedicated to the following of Jesus Christ remains constant in a period of change, as they nevertheless remain faithful to their founder or foundress' particular expression of living the gospel. They have much apostolic and practical experience to offer the church about the relation of charism to ecclesial structure, and about models of shared governance with laity. This reservoir of experience and insight is a resource which does not appear to have had an impact on the *Lineamenta*.

Larger questions can be posed. How is this document intended to inspire those living religious life? How will a reassertion of ecclesial authority address the challenges the document mentions and encourage their resolution? Some pressing concerns face men and women in religious communities today. The document perhaps leaves to another time a consideration of the aging of women and men in religious communities, the effort to maintain their sponsored works with dwindling number of members, collaboration with laity, and new articulations of traditional forms of spirituality. The Mariological perspective on which the *Lineamenta* relies seems problematic. If Mary is proposed as a model of living virginity and the evangelical counsels, this seems to leave out laywomen. This final section of the document on Mary thus offers a theological perspective which many religious women find familiar, but less a source of inspiration than the formulators of the document. More recent reflections on Mary by women theologians might be a useful contribution. More satisfying is the final section on charism, which affirms the history of holiness and contribution of those who have lived the consecrated life.

Book Review: Edwina Gately's *I Hear a Seed Growing*

Julie Upton, RSM

Edwina Gately's book *I Hear A Seed Growing: God of the Forest, God of the Streets* is one of the finest reflections on ministry and examples of compassion that I have ever experienced. I use the word "experienced" rather than "read" because one cannot help being caught up in the lives of Edwina and her street people. Along with Edwina, I found myself questioning the structures of our society that keep the poor poor, condemning the prostitutes who work the streets, while cloaking their customers with respectability.

Edwina Gately worked as a teacher in Uganda, which led her to found the Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM) in England in 1969. Since its founding, it has established a center in the United States, and in addition, it has sent hundreds of missionaries to overseas missions.

I Hear A Seed Growing begins as Edwina enters a year of solitude and discernment, questioning the "what next-ness" in her life. Through her journal entries and poem-prayers we see how God leads her (and us) to a brothel and to the streets of Chicago.

What comes to birth slowly is Genesis House, offering hospitality and the chance for a better life for those who "work the streets." We meet Teddy Bear/Dolores and become intimately involved in her struggle to choose life—seeing, feeling, and finally even understanding how she keeps being lured back to the bottle and to the streets.

**More than anyone else,
Edwina kept reminding me of
Catherine McAuley — by her
courage, sense of humor,
and willingness to see the
imprint of God on the
hearts of society's
most despised.**

Edwina also takes us with her to the forest, to reflect on her experience of the streets, to recover a spiritual sense of balance, and to re-connect with the earth.

Intimacy with the earth leads to an intimacy with my own unique createdness and a sense of belonging to all of creation. When I am out of touch with the earth, I am disconnected from part of my soul.¹

She is always wary of selling out, being duped into thinking that she is the savior of the streets.

More than anyone else, Edwina kept reminding me of Catherine McAuley—by her courage, sense of humor, and willingness to see the imprint of God on the hearts of society's most despised. Edwina writes, "Justice demands that all people have shelter, food, clothing and a sense of belonging to a community that has a place for them."² That is exactly the way Catherine McAuley approached her mission of mercy.

As I read Edwina's poem "God Slipped In," I could actually feel Catherine reading over my shoulder:

God slipped into the brothel
when no one was looking
and sat amongst the ladies who
were drinking coffee and smoking reefers.
The jokes were loud and raucous,
the language harsh and strong,
until Debbie broke down and cried,
because a client refused to take her,
and threw her out with a curse,
useless, even for sex.
Then a hand reached out and held her.
A voice murmured, "We love you,"
and in the silence, between the sobs,
I knew that God had slipped in,
sitting amongst the ladies,
in silent and painful compassion.³

I highly recommend this book for personal enrichment or group reflection, for sisters and associates in particular. One could use parts of it in formation, spiritual direction, or mission effectiveness, both as a model for ministry and as a means for cultivating the apostolic dimension of spirituality.

Footnotes

1. Edwina Gately, *I Hear A Seed Growing: God of the Forest, God of the Streets* (Brabuco Canyon, CA: Source Books, 1990) 281.
2. Ibid, p. 84.
3. Ibid, pp. 256-257.

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