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Women and Scripture

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Dear Sisters and Friends,

People sometimes ask me, "Don't you want to be ordained?" I tell them No, and one of the biggest reasons has to do with my love for scripture. If I were a priest, I could only talk about scripture in little seven-minute increments. As a university professor I can require my students to pay attention to scripture for an hour three times a week. If you can't have the power of ordination, the power of time will substitute well enough. And as Mary Aquin O'Neill, R.S.M., of Mount St. Agnes Center remarked at the MAST meeting in Pittsburgh in 1994, women may not have power at the altar, but they do at the table. This is her rationale for scheduling events for women around a beautifully set table and preparation of a meal.

Women may not be authorized to preach the gospel at the Eucharistic celebration, but they preach and teach the scripture in myriad ways. Our work typically doesn't require a degree in theology or a specialization in biblical studies. Prayer groups, theological reflection circles, retreats, parish adult education programs, children's ministries, RCIA, liturgical preparation for Advent and Lent, spiritual direction, recovery and support groups, pastoral care in hospitals—all are privileged moments for women to be announcers of the good news.

It is often in our power to choose a particular biblical text that will call attention to something truthful about God. Distortions in spiritual development and much personal suffering can persist for years. One reason is that many Christians have too little familiarity with the whole of scripture. The solution, however, is not a fundamentalist, literalist study of the bible, with a text to patch to each suffering like a band-aid.

Vatican II called on us to open up the entire treasury of the scriptures, meaning the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible, too. A striking case of this was what a nurse did for adolescent girls on her ward by retelling the stories about loyal Ruth, risk-taking Esther, and the woman who anointed Jesus. Prudence Delamater, with her lovely feminist surname, completed her M.A. thesis this year at Santa Clara University. For fifteen years, she has worked in a residential unit at Stanford Hospital in northern California with girls recovering from anorexia and bulimia. She recognizes that their spiritual life is important to them; unlike other patients, they often have bibles in their rooms. The official treatment program calls for nothing specifically religious. Prudence argued in her thesis that the healing and recovery process should address spiritual values. She developed reflective sessions built around the discussion of scripture stories as a way to help girls of any faith tradition move through their experiences of guilt, self-doubt, fear of sexuality, and fear of intimacy.

Our Mercy foundresses were inventive with scriptural education long before there was any issue about whether women should be officially ordained to carry it out. There was much preaching and teaching about scripture going on when the poor in Jamaica received support from Jessie Ripoll and the prisoners in New York were visited by Catherine Seton. Scripture inspired Gabriel Redican in plans for extending higher education to women, and consoled her in dark days when she felt her work had turned to ashes. Scripture is the sure anchor of Mercy spirituality and mission.

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Editor, MAST Journal

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Founding Women of Jamaica: Jessie Ripoll and Mother Winifred Furlong

Bernadette Little, R.S.M.

Although definite dates or parameters have been given for many of life's most significant events, the process that led to these events and the results that flowed from them, span a much longer time than the dates themselves suggest. In Jamaica, August 1, 1838, the proclamation of emancipation is one such date. It is difficult to assess precisely what was the most effective agent that brought to an end "the most despicable and iniquitous chapter in British history."[1] Whether it was the up-rising of the slaves themselves or the achievement of the tireless crusaders who campaigned to influence public opinion that unleashed the forces to bring about its final collapse, is not relevant here. What we wish to focus on at this time is the protracted struggle on the part of those brutalized to achieve anything even faintly resembling a modest human existence during the decades that followed emancipation.

The newly emancipated, unable to afford the price of land, had to continue to work on the plantation where wages were extremely low.

"During slavery, Africans were not classified legally as human beings, and consequently had no right to enter any legal agreement. Most planters were either disinterested or actively discouraged marriage among slaves, as it would not be economically feasible if they established nuclear unions or families."[2] This quotation, describing one aspect of the status quo during slavery, may well illustrate the fact that a declaration of emancipation in a particular year could in no way bring about a sudden reversal of a mind-set or value system that had been operative for more than two-hundred years. The effects of this opposition to legalized marriage may be seen even today in the high percentage of casual unions which are directly related to the population explosion on the island.

Economically, the situation was even more devastating. The newly emancipated, unable to afford the price of land, had to continue to work on the plantation where wages were extremely low. The average field wage was nine pence a day for a woman (less than twenty cents in U.S. currency at that time) and one shilling and six pence for men (approximately forty cents, U.S. currency at that time).[3]

Lord S. Oliver in Jamaica, the Blessed Island wrote of that time: "In many districts marks of decay abound. Neglected fields, crumbling houses, fragmentary fences.....these are common sights, and they soon become familiar observation.....Towns are not less gloomy."[4]

The Jamaican yard was a unique institution. A series of one room shacks, perhaps as many as ten or twenty one-room homes, each 10ft. by 10ft., could be found in a single compound. Each of these shacks was home for an entire family which numbered anywhere from ten to twenty persons. Each room had a few essential pieces of furniture: a bed on and/or under which everyone slept, a chair and a small table. Most rooms or huts were made of wattle-and-daub walls, grass roofs and earth floors. Approximately four fifths of the population had hookworm or other intestinal parasites.[5]

These were harsh conditions for the masses of the people who lived in these primitive dwellings in which overcrowding reached unbelievable levels and in which there was almost no ventilation or sanitation.[6] Poverty, unbalanced diet and the very bad living conditions kept the masses chronically sick. Epidemics swept the island from time to time.

It was in this arena that Jessie Ripoll, a Jamaican laywoman, inspired by an intense love of God and the suffering poor, organized relief services for the destitute and the suffering in Kingston's slums. She was assisted in this effort by several young ladies who organized themselves into a club which dispensed help from a room in Jessie's home which was named the "Poor Relief Station."[7] High on the list of those who received assistance were poor orphan children.

It became clear to Jessie and her companions that something more far-reaching should be undertaken for children who were poor and underprivileged. They petitioned the Vicar Apostolic, Thomas Porter, S.J., for his approval to open an orphanage for children. Not only did he give his consent but he promised to ask Sisters from Europe to join them with the hope the European Sisters would receive these Jamaican ladies into their congregation.

Early in 1880 a property on South Camp was put up for sale. It consisted of a small cottage (5 rooms) and forty-three acres of land. It was with the consent of the Vicar Apostolic that the ladies bought the property on South Camp with "money from their own pockets, from offerings of friends added to what the Vicar Apostolic subscribed, for the sum of 800 pounds."[8] This property was called Alpha.

On May 1, 1880 Jessie Ripoll walked up the path to Alpha Cottage, "with one lone orphan girl." This

was the beginning of the great social work that would bring wide acclaim from rich and poor alike and from persons in every walk of life. As the early months and years passed by and the work of Alpha expanded, other ladies came to join the original few and Jessie acted as "Superior" of them all under Father Porter's direction. Seventy orphan girls were admitted and Jessie went out regularly to solicit gifts and donations for her little ones.

In 1884 Father Porter went to England and in his eagerness to have Sisters take charge of and carry on the work in Jamaica, he called on the Superior of Convent of Mercy, Crispin Street in East London but she offered him no encouragement.[9] Four years later Fr. Porter again returned to England where he grew seriously ill and died. In his death the ladies and children lost their father and friend, but the ladies, with Jessie as their leader continued bravely and determinedly in their ministry. They felt the work they had undertaken belonged to God who would come to their assistance.[10]

Father Thomas Porter's successor was Jamaica's first Bishop, the Reverend Charles Gordon, S.J., D.D., who came to Kingston, Jamaica in 1889.[11] It was in July,1890, that a letter written by P.J. Chandlery, S.J. ,on behalf of Bishop Charles Gordon to Reverend Mother Ann Joseph Flemming was received at Bermondsey in England. It was read to the assembled community. The author of the Annals wrote that this "letter, so eloquently enthusiastic stirred many a chord in the hearts of brave women, who at once volunteered for foreign service. Prayers for light and guidance were recited by the community. The matter was duly weighed and discussed till at length it was decided to accept the foundation."[12]

The religious chosen were those who had first volunteered. They left England on November 26,1890, and arrived in Kingston, Jamaica on December 12,1890, to assist and continue the work begun 10 years earlier by Jessie Ripoll and her companions. Leading the little band of five Sisters (three professed and a novice and one postulant) was Reverend Mother M. Winifred Aloysius Furlong, a religious of 38 years. Who can measure the extent of the generosity of this woman and her companions who would in the face of the unknown leave their native England to embrace the land of the stranger? This courageous, humble and unassuming woman won the admiration and love of all who knew her. She was gentle and caring and ever ready to enter wholeheartedly into every project and activity undertaken by the community.

Her openness, generosity and vision were evident as she lost no time in receiving the young ladies who had pioneered the work at Alpha into the community of Mercy. These ladies, Jessie Ripoll, Josephine Ximines and Louise Dugiol began a probation which the Bishop decided to shorten since they had already had some experience of community life. Nor was Mother Winifred content to confine the ministry of the Sisters to the work at Alpha. She encouraged them to open elementary schools to serve the poor at Holy Family in the inner city as well as at Alpha Primary. For the newly arrived, Jamaica was in the words of the historian Osborne, "the land of the pioneer and a challenge to their dreams of heroic work. After incorporating the four Jamaican ladies into the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, this small band of nine began their island-wide work for the poor."[13]

"These good sisters had carried on the work from the opening of Alpha 1880, under many trials and discouragements. Surely the dear Lord has a great reward awaiting these generous souls."

Pioneering days were hard and rough and the tropical heat coupled with the poor sanitary conditions in Jamaica in the nineteenth century had an adverse effect on most of the Sisters. They suffered first from typhoid and then from tuberculosis. Disease, like death, is no respecter of persons, and Mother Winifred was to be a victim of both. Perhaps her indefatigable spirit buoyed her up when typhoid struck her in 1892. But in 1893 she succumbed to tuberculosis at the early age of forty-one. Perhaps even more difficult to bear than sickness was the cross of misunderstanding which came from one who should have been her greatest support. When her strength was failing (October, 1893) the Bishop added to her burden by demanding that she undertake duties beyond her strength since she "should fight against a slight weakness and not give in to every ache and pain."[14] One of her last expressions was, "The Bishop will feel many things when I am dead. Tell him I forgive him everything and that my last word is that he will be kind to the Sisters. May God bless him and his work."[15]

The void left by the death on November 21,1893, of this beautiful, gentle woman was difficult to bear. The sacrifice of leaving country and friends in England to go "to the missions" had been made with all the "generosity of her great soul.[16] It is not surprising that the works she founded and the spirit of selfless giving that was hers has continued to flourish not only in the institutions established by her, but in the lives and works of the many Sisters of Mercy who have succeeded her for more than100 years.

Scarcely three years after her arrival in Jamaica, Mother Winifred was laid to rest. By contrast, Jessie

Ripoll, known in religion as Sister Claver and in her later years as Mother Claver, lived into her nineties. On the occasion of her Silver Jubilee in religious life in 1918, the analyst wrote of her and Josephine Ximines: "These good sisters had carried on the work from the opening of Alpha 1880, under many trials and discouragements. Surely the dear Lord has a great reward awaiting these generous souls."[17]

Because Mother Claver's death was in December 1949, most of the Sisters at Alpha can boast of the privilege of having known this kind and gentle woman. She held office for several years as one of the "Discreets," a term used earlier to designate the four executive officials in a religious community. As such she was responsible for the temporal assets of the Sisters. The Sisters speak of Jessie Ripoll as humble and saintly, a great and noble soul living pre-eminently a life of charity. She loved the young Sisters. She charmed them and little children with her sweet and quiet life of sanctity and gentleness.

The maturity and selflessness she manifested in allowing others to give direction to the ministries she had founded and established on a firm footing is evidence of her greatness and magnanimity. She never lost her love and enthusiasm for serving the poor. This predilection for the underprivileged was her characteristic trait. It was a quality that marked her every endeavor and was the secret of her success. She understood that there was a link between the poverty of her young charges and the wealth and social conditions of the privileged classes in the society of her day. This recognition led her to the streets of Kingston to solicit the wealthy for gifts to bring to the orphans in her care. Her commitment and dedication has unleashed in other Sisters of Mercy in Jamaica the courage not only to challenge the status quo but also to envision and establish new ways of cooperation between the social groups in metropolitan Kingston and, indeed, throughout Jamaica.

Jessie Ripoll died on December 10, 1949 at the age of 92 years, having completed a life full of kindness and humility, hard work and charity. It was thus that a small seed, planted by a caring, courageous, determined woman fired with love of God, has grown into an establish-ment that has been described as the largest educational institution in Jamaica.[17]

Footnotes

1. Terence Brady & Evan Jones, *The Fight Against Slavery,* London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1975, p.138.
2. June Wallace, "CXC History: Radio Teachers' Guide," 1988, p. 11. Located in the library at Convent of Mercy, Alpha, South Camp Road, Kingston, Jamaica. The acronym CXC stands for Caribbean (E)xamination Council. As it was a new examining body, replacing the London, Oxford and Cambridge University exams, it was deemed advisable to re-write most texts and to provide study guides and assistance for teachers who were trained and accustomed to another mode. Some of these guides and lessons were made available by radio and later through television, hence "Radio Teachers'" Guide prepared in Kingston, Jamaica.
3. Bridget Brereton, *Social Life in the Caribbean 1838-1938.*" Oxford, England/Kingston, Jamaica: Heineman International, 1985, 1988, p. 23.
4. June Wallace, Radio Teachers' Guide, p. 96.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
7. Francis Osbourne, S.J. *History of the Catholic Church in Jamaica.* Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988, p. 257.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
9. *Annals* of the Sisters of Mercy in Jamaica, Vol. 1. Probable scribe: Sister Mary de Chantal Higgins. Archival material preserved at Convent of Mercy, Alpha, South Camp Road, Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
13. Osbourne, p. 296.
14. *Annals,* p. 30.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
17. Osbourne, p. 296.

Mercy in Cyberspace

Mercy-L, a discussion group for Sisters of Mercy and Associates around the world, is now available on the Internet. To subscribe, send a message to *listserv@sjuvm.stjohns.edu.* Leave subject line blank and turn off automatic signature. Your Message should read: "subscribe mercy-l yourfirstname yourlastname." If you have any difficulties or would like further information, please contact the listowner: Julie Upton, RSM (zejuthe@stjohns.ed) or (zejuthe@sjumusic.stjohns.edu)

Catherine Seton of New York: "Love the Poor . . . Love the Works of Mercy"

Ann Marie Caron, R.S.M.

Four million people came to the United States between 1840 and 1860.[1] Seventy percent of them came through New York. The largest groups of immigrants were from Ireland and Germany. Political unrest and economic conditions in Germany were major causes of the influx of German immigrants to the United States. Between 1846 and 1855 over one million arrived in the port city of New York. Similarly, the Great Famine (1845-1849), poverty and political unrest were conditions which caused people to emigrate from Ireland. In the 1830's New York City's Sixth Ward was reputed to be the largest Irish community in the United States. By 1855 one of every three people in the area had been born in Ireland. The great famine migration increased their numbers, and by 1860, 203,740 foreign-born Irish lived in New York.

In the milieu of this expanding city fraught with poverty, struggle and hope, the works of Mercy took root.

Neighborhoods were fundamental to the increasingly cosmopolitan quality of the port of New York. People did not live in the city but on a specific block in a given neighborhood. Decade after decade new neighborhoods expanded the city limits, new parishes emerged, and such growth generally added a new ingredient of difference to the Catholic church of New York. From the formal beginning of Catholic New York in 1785 down to the Civil War and beyond, Irish-born laity, priests and religious occupied dominant positions in the Catholic community.

In the milieu of this expanding city fraught with poverty, struggle and hope, the works of Mercy took root. The Sisters of Mercy arrived in the port of New York in May, 1846. Sister Agnes O'Connor and a small number of sisters made the long sea journey to New York in response to the invitation of Bishop John Hughes to open a House of Mercy for the care of recently arrived immigrant girls, many of whom were Irish. The Sisters were in the city only a few months when the Commissioners of Charity offered them free access to the prisons and hospitals. From their earliest days in New York City the primary aims of the Institute of Mercy were actualized.

Few that see the Sisters gliding like shadows through the crowded streets of the city on their errands of mercy ever realize the harrowing scenes at which they are present, or the different phases of human misery with which they are familiar. Few follow them to the bedside where want and disease struggle for mastery; to the cell where the condemned criminal counts the hours that intervene between him and eternity; to the damp cellar, to the miserable garret, to the home of virtuous poverty, to the pallet of repentant crime. Could we but accompany the Sisters of Mercy on their rounds, enter with them the haunts of the poor, listen to the tale poured into their sympathizing ears, or read in the worn faces and attenuated forms the untold story of woe and want, we might be able to realize the value of the Institute of Mercy in such a city as New York.[2]

Catherine Josephine Seton

Catherine Josephine Seton (1800-1891), a prominent woman of New York, was the first American to join the New York foundation of the Sisters of Mercy. It seems it was Mother Agnes O'Connor's description of the works of Mercy that most attracted her. At the age of forty-six, Catherine Seton was neither unfamiliar with religious life nor with charitable work among New York City's poor. Her mother, Saint Elizabeth Bayley Seton was the American foundress of the Sisters of Charity. Catherine, born in 1800,[3] was named after her grandmother Catherine Bayley and was called "Kit," "Kate," or "Jos." Her father died when she was three. A short time after his death Elizabeth Seton and the children became Catholics. Of Elizabeth's children, only Catherine and her brother William survived to adulthood. Catherine in fact, lived to be ninety-one.

Most of Kit's childhood years were spent in Emmitsburg with her mother, family and the Sisters of Charity. When she was sixteen her mother "felt she should begin to see more of the world than the Valley and the Sisters and boarders...[she] had... a splendid opportunity for advanced drawing and music lessons; she was exceptionally proficient in music, and earned her whole livelihood by teaching piano to the children of St. Joseph's, at a salary of $200.00 a year."[4] She "was allowed to go to Baltimore in Madame Chatard's carriage, to visit Ann Tiernan, whom Mother Seton knew as a student at St. Joseph's."[5] On her visit to New York "[t]he town, and her relatives, took her by storm... [she] began a perpetual round of social calls, parties and protracted visits."[6] She was very taken with the Seton family. Elizabeth Seton, however, made arrangements for her daughter to live with General and Mrs. Harper of Baltimore after her own death. Catherine was only twenty-one when her mother died.

In the last years of her mother's life, Catherine was her nurse and her secretary.

As previously arranged, Catherine stayed with the Harper family for a few years, then seems to have been a long-term guest in the homes of her family's friends and relatives in America and Europe from the mid-1820's to the early 1830's.[7] Her brother William married Emily Prim, whose father owned the Bank of New York. Catherine lived in his household in New York City in the 1830's to mid-1840's, probably leaving from there when she joined the Sisters of Mercy. During these same years she also traveled in Europe for extended periods of time with William's family and other wealthy relatives and friends. She remained close to William's children throughout her life. Helen became a Sister of Mercy and Richard became a diocesan priest.

It seems that Catherine considered marrying an ambassador but they mutually chose to separate for religious reasons. In the early 1840's, like many wealthy Catholic women, Catherine Seton was closely affiliated with the works of the Sisters of Charity in New York, namely orphanages and school, and she was also active in the social betterment of poor women. By the mid-1840's she had consulted her friend Bishop John Hughes of New York about entering a religious order. He is reported to have said,"I know an order which will satisfy your aspirations and I mean to introduce it into my diocese very soon."

On the 11th of October, 1846, Catherine joined Agnes O'Connor and the other Sisters of Mercy on 18 West Washington Place. She was the first American postulant of the New York community. She received the novice's white veil on April 9,1847 from Bishop Hughes who also preached the sermon at her ceremony. Bishop McCloskey[8] and several of the clergy were present, in addition to many of Catherine's relatives and friends, several of whom were Protestants.[9] On April 17th, 1849, Catherine, known in religion as Mary Catherine, professed her vows.

The previous year on May 1, 1948, the community had moved from West Washington Place to St. Catherine's Convent of Mercy. Situated on the corner of Houston and Mulberry Streets, this house was more centrally located and nearer to the poor districts. In 1849 the House of Mercy, adjacent to the convent, was opened to augment their ministry with immigrant girls. Their goal was to teach these women domestic trades and to find them work in the city. From St. Catherine's Convent the community also continued their ministry of visitation of the poor in homes, hospitals and prisons. Catherine Seton participated in all aspects of these ministries yet she is most often associated with ministry to prisoners.

"Prison Sister"

Catherine rejoiced in the title"Prison Sister." Twice a week for some twenty-five years she was actively involved in this work of mercy and indirectly involved almost until her death. "The old prison seems to be a part of myself, as it has been ... my first interest upwards of fifteen years...when I first visited it with Sister Mary Xavier Steward (Miss Steward of Baltimore) long since dead —."[10]

Catherine not only visited prisoners, but also organized the visiting of the Tombs and Sing Sing so that three times a week two Sisters went to the Tombs, and once every month two went to Sing Sing prison.[11] On Sundays Sisters went often to the boys' section of the Tombs to provide religious instruction.In her letter to Mother M. Augustine McKenna in the summer of 1862 Catherine remarked:"We have come bravely through the summer, I was able to go to the prison every Wednesday and Sunday, except one, and then I was too weak to go.[12] Catherine was sixty-two years old.

At eighty-three years of age her interest in the needs of prisoners had not waned. Younger members of the community were responsible now for this work of Mercy, yet Catherine's perduring concern for prisoners, the qualities needed of experience and prudence, and the reputation of the Order in carrying out this ministry are clearly indicated.

Catherine herself was very effective in prison ministry.

The city Prison, the Old Tombs, we have always considered its visitation as a duty peculiarly belonging to our Order of Mercy, and for thirty-seven years we have attended to it without intermission. We admonished the sinners, attended to the sick, prepared the convicts for death. They are very trying but most interesting duties, requiring much prudence and experience.[13]

It seems it was a situation of interference by another order, less experienced in this ministry which motivated Catherine to pen this letter. Quite simply she remarked: "...their blunders will be attributed to us." Thus she asks the Archbishop to resolve this matter.

Catherine herself was very effective in prison ministry. Two stories follow. The first illustrates her attentiveness, compassion and gospel zeal.[14] One day when talking to a man she noticed another in the next bed, a drooping figure with his face turned to the wall, and evidently not wishing to be spoken to at all. But after a while he turned to her as she tried to talk to him and told her he had consumption and that all he wanted was to live long enough to get even with the man responsible for sending him to prison.

Catherine talked of forgiveness to him and he laughed. "Sister, I haven't made the sign of the cross

or said a prayer in fourteen years. Don't waste your time talking to me. Go get some of the fellows that really want to hear you." But she persisted, and eventually he smiled and accepted a rosary. "Just recite the creed sometimes for my intention," she said coaxingly. "Do you know what you really need most of all? A bottle of sunshine to make you better." And then it was time to go and she said no more.

The following month she found her patient still in the hospital. But this time he was waiting for her and greeted her with a smile. "Sister," he began as soon as she came up to him, "I kept thinking of that expression of yours: a bottle of sunshine. I kept puzzling over what you meant. And finally I decided you meant the sunshine of the grace of God. And the next day I got to thinking some more and it seemed pretty mean of me to promise to say just the creed for you so I started in on the rosary. And then the next week," and he looked at her a little embarrassed, "I went to confession and now I feel like a new man."

Another incident involved a young prisoner at Sing Sing who was dying of tuberculosis.[15] He told her he had only one wish: he wanted to see the blue sky again and stand under it a free man before he died. His crime had been merely petty theft and he had been a good lad before this one offense. Catherine went to Governor Hoffman personally regarding this sad young prisoner and got him a pardon. Three weeks after his release she had word of his death. This story merely hints at Catherine's work for justice in a city of new immigrants.

Apostolic zeal seemed most characteristic of Catherine.

One of her many gifts was a facility in languages. When she began work in the Tombs, Catherine was fluent in both French and Italian.To minister and communicate more effectively she soon learned to speak German and Spanish. Again in a city with tremendous ethnic diversity, these languages were of great assistance.

Catherine was especially attentive to any prisoner who was ill, visiting him daily until he was out of danger or moved from his cell to the hospital. Ministering to those sentenced to be executed was one of the most difficult duties. The Sisters visited every man who was Catholic and any non-Catholic who asked.

Catherine was especially attentive to the spiritual needs of these men. On the day of a man's execution, she would accompany him to chapel where he received Communion and then she would return to the chapel to pray fervently for him. With her compassionate presence and through her prayer many prisoners were converted and many were prepared for baptism.

So concerned was she for the spiritual well-being of prisoners that she "felt heartsick" when she learned from an ex-prisoner that priests were lax in their responsibilities to prisoners in Sing Sing. "It seems to me like souls calling out to us from hell," she wrote.[16] She appealed to the Archbishop to "try to effect their Easter confessions." And she offered him examples of how other clergy had ministered effectively at Sing Sing. "Very holy people," she wrote, "would blame my activity — but I cannot help it and I trust to your fatherly indulgence to excuse me and my cause is a good one."

Until the time of her last illness in 1891, which preceded her death by only a few days, Catherine supervised this cherished duty. It was a matter of course for the Sisters who had visited the prison to turn into her room at evening recreation to give her an account of the day.[17]

Outreach to the Poor

When Catherine became a Sister of Mercy in 1846, she had been a woman of notable wealth and high social standing. At that time a special provision was made for a certain sum of her money to be set aside so that each month the interest on this sum was sent to her to carry out any charity she wished. From the "instruction room" in the House of Mercy on Houston Street Catherine carried out a ministry "to the outside poor." From here she distributed food and clothing to the needy. She rarely gave money for fear it might be used in the nearest gin shop. On occasions, such as special feast days, dinners were celebrated with the orphans or poor old men. She was frequently apprised of special needs. With a heart tender towards God's poor, Catherine found it difficult to refuse any of them. She often depended on the generosity of her numerous friends in society to provide the various supplies for "her dear prisoners." Tobacco, soap, clean clothing, stamps, letter-paper, and all sorts of little things found their way through her hands to the needy. It was said that the hospital inmates greeted the Sisters with joy, for they knew that the baskets they carried held something good. Medicines were also supplied to prisoners as well as sent to the sick in their homes.

One of the anecdotes recorded about her love for the poor took place on her silver jubilee in 1871.[18] On this occasion she was presented by the Sisters with a number of suits of men's clothing in the pockets of which twenty-five dollars in silver was deftly concealed, as she had many male "friends" in the instruction-room as well as in the gloomy solitudes who were so often cheered by her saintly presence.

Apostolic zeal seemed most characteristic of Catherine. Thus, it is not surprising that she also enjoyed the work of adult catechesis with many who came to the convent. She is remembered as saying, "This is my privilege, I love to do it." She viewed this ministry as a divine work, continuing the work of Jesus. The breadth of her life experiences and her

comfortableness in the ecumenical milieu of her family and friends had prepared her to speak freely with persons of different religious denominations and to witness to the joy of the Catholic faith.

Catherine was a very persuasive woman. She influenced wardens, doctors, and other significant people, and was able to accomplish the reforms she wanted. She exerted her influence within the community of the Sisters of Mercy as well. For many years this woman, with astute business acumen, was president of the corporation. From 1864 until 1871 she filled the office of Mother Assistant and did all in her power to promote the welfare and happiness of the community.[19]

In 1881 Catherine wrote to the archbishop saying: "We the senior sisters of the community are full of fear and anxiety about our Novitiate...The health and strength of our sisters are failing, young sisters should be trained ready to continue, and even increase our works of Mercy towards the poor, sick and ignorant."[20] She explained to the Archbishop that, although there was "a promising postulant" ready for novitiate, the superior was unwilling and delayed her reception. Thus Catherine recommended that the archbishop make it a point to talk to the Reverend Mother. "Shall the good we can do, the souls we might save be lost, because we refuse to make an effort to increase our novitiate."

When her own niece, Helen Seton, also named Mary Catherine in religion, requested to transfer to the Sisters of Mercy in Providence, the senior Catherine Seton wrote to the Archbishop supporting her niece's request, providing him with a detailed explanation of why he should grant her the necessary permission.

Catherine Josephine Seton died on April 3, 1891, at Saint Catherine's Convent on East 81st Street. She was ninety-one. Sometime after her death the following was found in her own handwriting: "The years to come I will not fear, dear Lord, and now that I cannot serve You any longer by a life of activity, I offer You, my God, the sacrifice of my nothingness and my constant acts of love." Over the course of her forty-five years as a Sister of Mercy the community increased in members, and as the port city of New York ever expanded its neighborhoods, convents of Mercy were opened and closed as the Sisters responded to invitations in ministry.

The day before Catherine died following a very brief illness, she rallied for a few moments. She is remembered by the Sisters to have said: "What a grand Order is the Order of Mercy!... Love the poor. Do all you can for them. Love the works of mercy..."

Footnotes

1. See Rev. Msgr. Florence D. Cohalan, *A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York* (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1983), especially p.61. And Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church*. New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865 (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).
2. Helen M. Sweeney, *The Golden Milestone 1846-1896* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1896), p. 44.
3. For information on Catherine's early life until age 21, I am drawing on the following works: Ann Elizabeth Seton, 1774-1821, [Letters of Mother Seton to Mrs. Julianna Scott] (edited by Rev. Joseph B. Code, Emmitsburg: Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul, 1935; Annabelle M. Melville (Annabelle McConnell), *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 1774-1821 (New York: Scriber, 1951); Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., *Mrs. Seton Foundress of the American Sisters of Charity*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1962). See also Peggy Eastman, "Catherine Seton: Daughter of A Saint," *Share* (Summer 1992):12,13. Eastman bases her article on a lecture given by Sister Ann Miriam Gallagher, R.S.M., professor of church history at Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland.
4. Dirvin, *Mrs. Seton*, p.378.
5. Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, p.261.
6. Dirvin, *Mrs. Seton*, p.413.
7. I am grateful to the archivist of the Sisters of Charity at Mount Saint Vincent in New York for information on Catherine between the years 1821-1846.
8. John McCloskey was a seminarian at Saint Mary's in Baltimore in 1821 where he met three men who would have an influence on his career: Father John Dubois, Father Simon Bruté, and Father John Hughes. During a visit to Rome in 1837, at an audience with Pope Gregory XVI, a small group of Americans were present. Among them were the daughter and granddaughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Connolly of Philadelphia and Catherine Seton. Thus their friendship goes back several years. See Cohalan, [A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York,] pp.64,68.
9. Annals. Archives of the Sisters of Mercy of New York.
10. Letter dated March 25th from Catherine Seton to Archbishop of New York. Archives, Saint Joseph Seminary. Though no year is given, from internal evidence it would seem the letter would date from the mid-1860's. Sister Mary Xavier Steward died in 1853.
11. See Kathleen Healy, R.S.M., *Sisters of Mercy Spirituality in America 1843-1900*. Sources of American Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 244-247 for copies of letters from the prisoners to the Sisters.
12. Letter from Catherine Seton, Houston Street, 1862 to Mother M. Augustine McKenna, Beaufort, N.C., Archives. Sisters of Mercy, New York.
13. Letter to Archbishop Corrigan. Archives. St. Joseph Seminary.
14. See Sweeney, *The Golden Milestone*, pp.94,95.
15. *Ibid.*, p.95.
16. Letter dated March 25, from Catherine Seton, Convent of Mercy, Houston Street, to the Archbishop. Archives. Saint Joseph Seminary, New York.
17. Annals. Archives. Sisters of Mercy, New York.
18. Annals. Archives. Sister of Mercy, New York. Also in Golden Milestone, p.64.
19. Annals. Archives. Sisters of Mercy, New York.
20. Letter. Archives, Saint Joseph Seminary, New York. In addition to Catherine's signature, the letter was also signed by two other Sisters. A third was mentioned, as she was in Balmville, Catherine noted, "we feel confident ....[she] would sign ... if here."

Gabriel Redican, R.S.M.: The Early Days of Mercy Higher Education

Mary-Theresa McCarthy, R.S.M.

In 1905, Gabriel Redican founded the world's oldest extant Mercy-sponsored four-year liberal arts college. Through higher education, she sought to empower women during an era when such an innovative idea was considered radical. Observing her own Sisters, she had concluded that they and others of their gender would have richer, more meaningful lives if they were instructed in liberal arts with emphasis on religious studies and philosophy. The opportunity for such learning at that time was only readily available to men. Gabriel Redican was to change that reality.

On April 8, 1851, in Worcester, Massachusetts, she was born Anna Veronica Redican, daughter of Bridget and James J. Redican. Annie, as her three siblings called her, was seventeen when on October 10, 1868, she entered the Convent of Mercy in Manchester, New Hampshire. She volunteered to become one of New Jersey's first Sisters of Mercy. In 1871, she was sent to Jersey City, on the west bank of the Hudson, just across the river from downtown Manhattan. There, Gabriel and six other Manchester Sisters taught school in the basement of Saint Patrick Church. Their pupils' impoverished families were Irish immigrants from Mayo, Galway and Roscommon.

One day after teaching, the nuns returned to their convent and found their possessions on the sidewalk. Before their eviction, they had been unaware that the pastor, Patrick Hennessey, was not paying their rent. The Sisters were humiliated. They were also homeless until a parishioner offered two rooms where all seven of them could sleep and store their belongings. Those missionaries lived a life of poverty much more abject than what their vow demanded. They were denied such necessities as sufficient food and heat. Gabriel nevertheless persevered and in 1872, she became the first Sister of Mercy to profess her vows in New Jersey. A year later, Francis Warde, American foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, brought a second community from Manchester to a New Jersey mission. This one was farther southwest, in Bordentown.

Meanwhile, two of the original seven Jersey City nuns died during the first six years. In June, 1878, the pastor closed the school because he could not support it. Gabriel and the other four survivors returned to Manchester for the summer. They withdrew reluctantly because they knew that only education could break their students' cycle of poverty.

Mercy Moves to Princeton

No sooner had they regained their health at the motherhouse when another New Jersey pastor, Thomas R. Moran from Princeton, appealed for Sisters to staff his school. Francis Warde agreed to provide them because she understood how disappointed Gabriel and her companions felt about abandoning their ministry in New Jersey. Two new members joined the community of Jersey City veterans and returned with the original group to the Garden State.

In October, 1878, The Princeton Press reported,"We learn from Father Moran that the school for Catholic children of both sexes, recently opened under his supervision, contains two to three hundred pupils. These are under the care and tuition of Sisters of Mercy from Manchester, New Hampshire."[1]

She (Gabriel) came to realize the need to provide a Catholic, liberal arts education for women.

As principal of that elementary school, Gabriel met such success that in September, 1880, according to *The Princeton Press*, she and her Sisters opened a secondary school, Saint Scholastica Academy. The newspaper boasted that the curriculum "would embrace tuition in all the English branches, French, Latin, drawing, and plain and fancy needlework." Lessons were also provided in music, oil painting and watercolors.[2]

Since those early days, there has always been a Convent of Mercy across Nassau Street from Princeton University. Although Gabriel had been in Jersey City when Saint Peter College for men was founded in 1872, that new Jesuit institution did not make a significant impression because her local, religious community was then struggling to survive, and there were urgent life and death situations demanding her attention.

Princeton is where Gabriel first observed campus activities and where she first met people engaged in academic life. She experienced the intellectual excitement of a college town and she perceived how enriched American students and professors were by contact with colleagues from abroad. She came to realize the need to provide a Catholic, liberal arts education for women. Since the foundation of Princeton University in 1746, it had admitted only men. No matter how intellectually gifted the young women graduating from Saint Scholastica Academy were, it was out of the question for them to consider pursuing higher

education at the campus adjoining theirs.

On July 18, 1882, the Manchester Mercies in New Jersey united, naming the Bordentown convent as motherhouse. They held an election which designated Gabriel Redican director of novices and member of the general council. In Princeton, she had observed the training of college-age men, never guessing that she would be asked to spend twelve years working with college-age women. She was fair with her young Sisters but she was exacting in matters of observance. The novices accepted her stern corrections, knowing that she never required more of them than she expected of herself.

Because Gabriel was American-born, she was the exception in her congregation. Most of the Sisters whom Francis Warde assigned to New Jersey were Irish. There was no parochial school system in their native Ireland. Each autonomous Convent of Mercy had an academy providing both financial support for the convent and new candidates for the community. The nuns replicated their Irish strategy in New Jersey, and their plan succeeded.

Mercy Includes the Amboys

By 1885, there were enough Sisters to establish two new missions. One was in Camden. Gabriel Redican became superior and principal of the other in South Amboy. She assumed this new responsibility and simultaneously remained director of novices because the young Sisters she counseled were not novitiate trained. As soon as a candidate entered, she received on-the-job experience in the classroom of a parish school and the community of a local convent.

Their convent was a microcosm of local life in a blue-collar town

The convent provided for Gabriel by Saint Mary Parish was a double house. Half of it had been a shop with a storefront window and no shades, so the nuns lacked privacy in their new community room where before their arrival mounds of furnishings were visible from the outside. Everything was delivered to that room. Not only were tables, chairs, dishes and lamps stacked in shipping cartons, but beds, springs, mattresses and linens had also been left there. Before retiring on their first night, the nuns lifted, unpacked, carried, assembled and then finally made their beds.

A few days later, they began teaching two hundred seventy pupils, divided into four classes in the church. Although nearly seventy pupils were in each class, no partitions were provided. Whatever happened in one class was witnessed by all four classes. Children sat on kneelers, using pews as desks. If windows were opened, goats from a nearby farm poked bearded heads inside and chewed whatever was in sight to the delight of distracted scholars![3] The Sisters somehow managed to cope, although their community life was also bleak. Their poverty was real. Their convent was a microcosm of local life in a blue-collar town on the Raritan River.

In 1890, Gabriel crossed the Raritan and joined four other Sisters sent to staff Saint Mary School, Perth Amboy. The pastor, Peter Connolly, invited them because Bishop Michael O'Farrell had ordered him to replace lay teachers on his faculty with Sisters of Mercy. Father Connolly referred to the convent as "the burden over the way" in homilies at Sunday liturgy. His insensitive reference was humiliating for the Sisters present in the congregation.

Ironically, he was never burdened with convent maintenance. What he provided was a small frame house which was dirty and unfurnished when the nuns arrived. In the kitchen they found, at the bottom of a barrel, a rolling pin, breadboard, water dipper, milk pitcher and tin measuring cup. There was nothing else in the house. The Sisters had brought food for their supper, and they made a table by putting the breadboard on the barrel. Since Gabriel was the superior, her companions insisted she drink her tea from the measuring cup. Other tea drinkers shared the dipper and pitcher.

After supper, the group selected the room to be used as their chapel. Gabriel placed a Sacred Heart statue there. Years passed before a real chapel was provided. Meanwhile, their Sacred Heart shrine was the focal point in an oratory where they expressed faith which proved stronger than all the obstacles they encountered.[4]

Gabriel Presides

In 1900, the congregation elected [Reverend Mother] Gabriel Redican as director of novices enabling her to know all the young members of her congregation. Now her executive ability would enable her to bring out the best in each Sister by using individual talents to ministerial advantage.Two years after she became major superior, a new school opened in North Plainfield. It was named Saint Gabriel Academy in her honor. Mercy missions were thriving and becoming more numerous since vocations were increasing.

Gabriel asked Bishop James McFaul's permission in 1905 to build an addition to the motherhouse. He surprised her by ordering her to abandon Bordentown, find a location with a more promising future and locate on a main New York-Philadelphia railroad line. Not knowing what on earth to do, Gabriel looked toward heaven for direction. She requested that a rosary for guidance be said in every convent. "Hail

Mary," those words of the Angel Gabriel echoed throughout the congregation. Within months, thirty acres of the Watchung Mountains were donated by David Kenny whose daughter was a student at Saint Gabriel Academy. He often visited, bringing the nuns treats to enjoy and requesting prayers for his success in patenting the vacuum cleaner. When his invention made him wealthy, he asked the Bishop how he could express his appreciation for the Sisters' prayerful support. The Bishop knew about Kenny's land twenty miles southwest of Manhattan. It was only minutes from downtown Plainfield, which was then called the "Queen City of the East." It was on the main line of the Central Railroad of New Jersey with connections to Baltimore and Ohio, New York Central, Pennsylvania and Reading Lines.

College Is Planned

When David Kenny donated his property, the Sisters decided to name their new foundation Mount Saint Mary Academy in honor of Our Lady and in memory of his mother, Mary Kenny. Gabriel asked the Bishop's approval. He told her to establish Mount Saint Mary College as well as an Academy. Although overwhelmed at the Bishop's request, Gabriel knew the Bishop was right to voice the need for a women's college. She had been aware of that need since her Princeton days. If she could provide a liberal arts education for students graduating from Mercy academies throughout the state, she would make a meaningful contribution to God's people in New Jersey. A college would also be a means of initiating sister formation opportunities for the congregation. As director of novices, Gabriel had assigned young teachers to Catholic schools throughout an area which now includes the dioceses of Camden, Metuchen and Trenton. How much better they could have been prepared for those assignments if they first had the advantage of higher education.

Laywomen preparing for a teaching career at that time attended state-sponsored normal schools for teacher training. Religious teachers also needed preparation. No member of the congregation was more aware of that need than was the former director of novices, Gabriel Redican. She was delighted at the thought of being able to empower young women through advanced learning. She envisioned a curriculum to include not only pedagogy taught in normal schools, but also liberal arts with a strong emphasis on philosophy and religious studies. Her students would not only know how to teach, they would have intellectual mastery of the content to be taught and a strong moral frame of reference from which to present their lessons. What the Bishop asked her to do was exactly what she knew should be done. She had never imagined herself as the one to do it, but she was a courageous, assertive, spiritual woman with staunch faith in the power of God's grace.

Typewritten minutes from the first meeting of the college board of trustees, dated December 8, 1905, are preserved in the motherhouse archives. They record the incorporation of Mount Saint Mary College. The Certificate of Incorporation was filed in Burlington County Courthouse, December 16, 1905. It was registered in Trenton with the New Jersey Secretary of State, January 5, 1906. This document described the institution as a non-profit "college for the education of girls and young ladies in all the higher branches of learning and art, and also to give religious training and instructions in morals, and to give diplomas and to confer degrees upon those successfully completing the prescribed course of study, and to confer honorary degrees..." One paragraph said that "officers of this corporation shall be a president, secretary and treasurer elected by the Board of Trustees from their number." On the day they drafted that Certificate of Incorporation, the trustees elected Gabriel Redican college president.[5]

In the History of the College, Gabriel outlined the primary objective of the new institution "to give to young women a well-balanced education along physical, intellectual and moral lines."

In the History of the College, Gabriel outlined the primary objective of the new institution "to give to young women a well-balanced education along physical, intellectual and moral lines." She added that "an effort will be made to so arrange and adapt the training that the graduates will be fitted to enter and to adorn any sphere of life. Special courses in domestic economy will prepare young women to become wise and efficient mistresses of homes. Training in education, music, arts and sciences will prepare them to enter vocational fields adapted to their special talents. Association with the Sisters will train them in the social graces and courtesies so essential to the leading women of all times."[6]

This women's college was a revolutionary venture. The Eastern Educational Establishment was then internationally recognized as including the world's finest institutions of liberal arts education for men. Halfway between two of the Ivy League constituents of that Establishment, the Sisters of Mercy founded Mount Saint Mary College. It was about twenty miles south of Columbia University and twenty miles north of Princeton University. This location did not intimi-

date the founding Sisters. On the contrary, they considered it a challenge and an advantage.

The College Opens

Gabriel Redican instinctively knew how to network. She succeeded in recruiting faculty for her college from higher education's most prestigious institutions. By the time she lifted a spadeful of earth to break ground on July 16, 1906, she had made professional contacts on the campuses of universities which belonged to the Eastern Educational Establishment. According to her description, "great care has been exercised in the selection of that most important part of a college, the professorial staff... Harvard and Columbia Universities and the Jesuits have already contributed three professors. The others are now being selected from institutions of similar rank."[7]

She was conscious of the significance of accreditation but knew little about getting a college accredited. She appealed to Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen for advice. He introduced her to his friend, John P. Murray, an international banker and attorney who was President of the State Board of Education. John Murray recommended outstanding professors, and Gabriel Redican hired them. Consequently, when classes started, September 28, 1908, a distinguished, well-qualified faculty was already in place. Seven students matriculated. We can only imagine how important they felt when the college carriage met their trains and drove them to their mountaintop which Gabriel described in the History of the College. "The campus is a clearing surrounded by a luxuriant forest. The main building is a huge granite structure containing airy dormitories and well-lighted classrooms. The chemical and physical laboratories, the gymnasium and the domestic science kitchens are fitted completely with the most approved modern equipment. The college girls' rooms are comfortable and cozy."[8] Higher education's newest candidates wandered happily from chapel or library to music rooms, studios, dining halls and baths. "The magnificent view from the buildings is unequalled," boasted Gabriel's account. "New York City can be seen from the roof garden."[9]

Fire Destroys the College

Less than two and a half years after the college opened, on March 2, 1911, The Plainfield Courier News printed these dreadful headlines: *Mount Saint Mary's College Totally Destroyed By Fire. Origin Supposed To Be Crossed Wires. Loss On Building - $210,000. Loss On Furnishings To Estimate. No One Injured.*[10] The Sisters and their seventy-seven students were spared, but the building was demolished.

Plainfielders were awakened to the howl of fire whistles and watched in horror as the mountaintop was consumed in flames fanned by March winds and reflected ominously against the black night sky. After making sure that everyone was safe and that nothing was salvageable, Gabriel collapsed. It was the first day of Lent. Bishop McFaul tried to cheer her by joking that the nuns took Ash Wednesday too seriously. He himself was serious, however, when he insisted that classes resume quickly.

The North Plainfield Board of Education put aside concerns about separation of Church and state. They offered the use of public high school science laboratories. Other college classes were scheduled in three borrowed houses in North Plainfield and in Saint Joseph Home, a local residence administered by the Sisters of Mercy for working women.

Her optimism was contagious because her community recognized her astute business sense and her undaunted belief in a loving divine providence.

In May, after spending a day negotiating with bankers and builders in New York City, Gabriel told her Sisters that with God's help they would be able to rebuild. Her optimism was contagious because her community recognized her astute business sense and her undaunted belief in a loving divine providence. She wanted four Sisters whose studies were nearly completed to graduate the following spring as planned. They needed some courses, and fortunately that year for the very first time, Catholic University opened its summer session to women. Gabriel was proud to send Sisters to Washington so they could be there among the original female students.

On April 30, 1912, Gabriel's fortieth anniversary of profession was celebrated in Saint Joseph Church, North Plainfield, where the Sisters' Choir joined the College Chorale singing the Mass of Loretto. This was followed by a reception during which Gabriel received a thousand-pound tower bell to chime the Angelus at the restored Mount Saint Mary. It was inscribed, "A loving tribute to Mother Mary Gabriel" and christened "Catherine McAuley." To this day, it rings the Angelus as a reminder of the Angel Gabriel's message so long ago. In June 1912, the first college commencement was held on the mountaintop amid ashen ruins. The Bachelor of Arts degree was conferred on seven graduates. Four of them were the Sisters who studied at Catholic University. Two of the others were New Jersey women; the third was from France. A month later, the congregation elected a new general council. Gabriel stepped down from her position as major superior to become bursar. This position allowed her

more time to organize the new college year which began at the new Mount Saint Mary on September 15, 1912.

College Reopens

Once again, Gabriel hired an outstanding faculty of eminent scholars. Education courses, for example, were taught by the State Commissioner of Secondary Education, a professor from Columbia University, the president of Trenton State Normal School and the Superintendent of Union County Schools. The staff of the education department was typical of the diversity which Gabriel sought to give students. She recruited two visiting professors from Germany, an historian from the University of Bonn and a scientist from Berlin University. A Harvard professor taught mathematics and two from Fordham taught English.

When the college wing was dedicated on October 19, 1913, the institution already had approval of the State Board of Education. During the ceremony, the Bishop announced that the new wing would be called "Gabriel Hall," in homage to the college president whose faith never wavered. Gabriel's happiness that day was deserved.

An Era Ends

It was a foretaste of Gabriel's eternal happiness which began March 31, 1916. The fire had taken a physical and emotional toll. When she was young, she bravely suffered hardships. The loss of the college was more crucial than any personal deprivation. Had she been unable to rebuild, there would have been irreparable loss to the diocese which counted on this college to educate Sisters for elementary and secondary schools. Young women planning to earn a degree at Mount Saint Mary would have been disappointed, as would parents who were proud to have daughters matriculate in college. Pondering her responsibility to her congregation, her students, their families and the Bishop, caused Gabriel's emotional stress because she took seriously her obligations toward others. She herself supervised the reconstruction of the building, and that physical labor taxed her bodily strength beyond its limits. It was only her indefatigable will power that enabled her to endure until the construction was complete.

Her obituary in The Plainfield Courier News credited her leadership as facilitating this project so that "in little more than a year, the college was constructed upon a larger scale than before and was ready for occupancy. Working forces were brought into harmony by her capacity for organization and her skill in leadership. "Her success in this regard," the article continued, "was the admiration of all who enjoyed the pleasure of her acquaintance, and the news of her death will be received with regret by the hundreds of young women from all parts of the country who in the years that have gone by, enjoyed the benefit of her educational ability, and the motherly kindness with which she looked after them."A noble woman, a noble religious, a noble educator has passed away. Her energy, her character, her initiative powers and her constructive work made her second to no woman in public life and second to few men."[11]

"To instruct the uneducated in God's chosen way is the chosen work of the Sisters of Mercy, and Mother Gabriel did her work ably and well. . ."

Before illness forced her to be bedridden, Gabriel saw the college firmly reinstated. It had the latest equipment and an expert staff. After her forty-five year ministry in education, Gabriel Redican had earned the right to rest in peace. Preaching her eulogy, Monsignor B. J. Mulligan said, "To instruct the uneducated in God's chosen way is the chosen work of the Sisters of Mercy, and Mother Gabriel did her work ably and well, training young minds, not only in the secular branches, but fashioning them into the discipleship of Christ." Her nobility of character, religious zeal, educational and executive ability were responsible for the founding of Mount Saint Mary College. She labored incessantly to bring the institution over which she presided to a degree of efficiency that would place it in the front rank of women's colleges, and she lived long enough to see her hopes realized."[12]

Marie LaSalle O'Hara, RSM, who chronicled the beginnings of New Jersey Mercy in her book, The First Fifty Years, asserted that the passing of Mother Gabriel took from the Sisters of Mercy an extraordinary leader, but "her work was finished."[13] A Courier News article predicted, "her life will inspire the bereaved members of her congregation with renewed devotion to that cause for which she gave the last full measure of devotion."[14] This prediction came true.

When Mount Saint Mary College was incorporated in 1905, there was a Mercy-sponsored college, Mount Saint Agnes, which had been founded in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1867. It was in 1912 that Mercy higher education began to flourish. In March, according to Reminiscences of Seventy Years (1846-1916), Saint Xavier University was chartered in Chicago.[15] In June, Gabriel's first class graduated. In September, Saint Joseph's College opened in Standish, Maine. In 1923, College of Saint Mary appeared in Omaha, Nebraska. College Misericordia was founded in Dallas, Pennsylvania, in 1924, followed a year later by Trinity College, Burlington, Vermont. In 1926, Mercyhurst College opened in Erie, Pennsylvania.

1928 saw the addition of Mount Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and in 1929, Carlow College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, Connecticut, joined the list in 1932. Salve Regina University emerged in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1934. Mount Aloysius College followed in Cresson, Pennsylvania, in 1939. Next came Michigan's University of Detroit Mercy, 1941. In 1948, Gwynedd-Mercy College opened in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Mercy College, Tarrytown, New York, in 1950, was joined in 1958 by Trocaire College, Buffalo, and Maria College, Albany. Castle College, Windham, New Hampshire, was founded in 1963, and Marian College, Swampscott, Massachusetts, 1964. Mercy College of Northwest Ohio, Toledo, was established in 1992.[16] It is exhilarating to learn the role Gabriel Redican played in this succession by founding what is today the oldest extant four-year Mercy-sponsored college.

To appreciate Gabriel as a pacesetter, we must imagine an era when higher education for women was an innovative idea.

To appreciate Gabriel as a pacesetter, we must imagine an era when higher education for women was an innovative idea. We take for granted equal opportunities without any concern about gender discrimination. A 1919 graduation address at Mount Saint Mary College, North Plainfield, provides a glimpse into an age when life was different. The speaker, James J. Walsh, medical director of the school of sociology at Fordham University, said, "I look forward to the time when there will be a dozen women's colleges under the direction of Sisters in this country, having nearly if not quite, five hundred students."[17]

There are nearly two dozen colleges sponsored by Sisters of Mercy, not to mention all those under the administration of other women's congregations. The college founded by Gabriel Redican has about 2,600 students. It is fascinating to trace the remarkable evolution which has occurred in a relatively short time regarding women's place in higher education.

The role Gabriel played in that evolution is commemorated in stone at Mount Saint Mary's Gabriel Hall in the Watchung Mountains above North Plainfield. It is remembered in a stained glass window depicting the Angel Gabriel in the students' chapel at Georgian Court College, near the edge of New Jersey's Pine Barrens. Gabriel's institution moved there in 1924. At both sites, contemporary Mercy is united with her in spirit when Angelus bells ring with memories of her patron saint.The greatest memorial to Gabriel Redican, however, is the multitude of graduates from Mercy-sponsored colleges. She was determined to establish education which gave women spiritual training along with the best intellectual, cultural and professional experiences that liberal arts instruction could provide.

Gabriel Redican owed her success to her personal sense of values. Without complaining, she suffered degradation on three of her early missions. She was homeless in Jersey City; principal for two- hundred-and-seventy children in South Amboy's one-room schoolhouse, she was lodged in an unfurnished convent in Perth Amboy. Such indignities were not experienced by Sisters in towns like Princeton where their academies assured their autonomy. When they joined parish teams, pastors were often overwhelmed by financial obligations resulting from the establishment of America's parochial school system. They consequently, and perhaps unwittingly, humbled and distressed Gabriel and her companions.She offered that anguish for the glory of her beloved Sacred Heart.

Every student at Mount Saint Mary College is still required to take a general education cluster of liberal arts courses. Philosophy and religious studies are still popular. The demography of today's student population might surprise Gabriel but it would please her. Among the best contemporary degree candidates are some older re-entry women. Because of their age or their finances, there are people in college now who could not have been during Gabriel's lifetime. They are majoring in fields unknown to her: biochemistry, business administration, accounting, computer science, economics, psychology and sociology. Their world has changed, but they are all doing what she intended. They are preparing spiritually, professionally and culturally for life.

Their success after graduation bears testimony to the value of their education. Although this opportunity is now available to non-traditional as well as traditional students, society still has its homeless, exploited, and abused women. Most often, they have not had the chance to improve their lot through higher education. Social workers ministering to them can only supply band-aid solutions. Gabriel's spirit prompts us rather to eliminate the causes of their misery by teaching women well and thus enabling them to avoid the kind of victimization which requires social assistance.

As Georgian Court College continues to expand its mission, it will someday have endowed faculty chairs. The Gabriel Redican Chair of Education would be an appropriate start. Its installation would serve as a reminder of this foundress' quest for excellence, her desire to empower women and her gift for networking. She did not hesitate to ask a United States Senator to advise her. She aggressively recruited professors from Ivy League schools. We must have the courage to

emulate her daring spirit if we are to offer the quality instruction which Gabriel exacted from her faculty. She believed that exposure to excellence would inspire students and enhance their lives. We have an obligation to keep her belief viable.

Devotion to Gabriel Redican's patron saint will also continue as computer networking daily becomes a more integral part of campus life. Andrew Greeley has named Saint Gabriel "patron of those who work with electronic communications."[18] That description fits members of today's college community. Consequently, as the millennium approaches, we may all find ourselves imploring the aid of this heavenly communications expert. We optimistically expect the Archangel Gabriel to be as attentive to our petitions as he was to those of his original Mercy namesake in New Jersey at the turn of the last century.

Footnotes

1. The Princeton Press, 1 October 1878, p.1.
2. The Princeton Press, 8 September 1880, p.3.
3. Marie LaSalle O'Hara, R.S.M., *The First Fifty Years—Sesquicentennial Edition*, Giovanni McDonough, R.S.M. ed. (Watchung, NJ: Sisters of Mercy, 1981), p. 74.
4. O'Hara, p. 87.
5. Certificate of Incorporation of Mount Saint Mary College of the Sisters of Mercy (unpublished document, 5 December 1905, Mount Saint Mary Archives).
6. Gabriel Redican, RSM, "Reasons for Opening This College," History of the College, Book I, Dedication Booklet (Watchung, NJ: Sisters of Mercy, 1908), p. 17.
7. Redican, p. 4.
8. Redican, p. 5.
9. Redican, p. 6.
10. The Plainfield Courier News. 2 March 1911, p. 1.
11. The Plainfield Courier News. 8 April 1916, p. 11.
12. B. J. Mulligan, "Eulogy," (unpublished document, 8 April 1916, Mount Saint Mary Archives).
13. O'Hara, p. 133.
14. The Plainfield Courier News. 8 April 1916, p. 11.
15. Sisters of Mercy, Saint Xavier's, Chicago. Reminiscences of Seventy Years (1846-1916) (Chicago: The Fred J. Ringley Co., Publishers, 1916), p. 260.
16. Mary Daly, ed. Tenth Anniversary Report of the Association of Mercy Colleges (Eire, Pa.: The Association of Mercy Colleges, 1994), p. 40.
17. James J. Walsh, "Graduation Address," (unpublished document, 13 June 1919, Mount Saint Mary Archives).
18. Andrew Greeley, *Irish American Blessings and Prayers* (Chicago: Thomas More Publishers, 1991), p. 98.

Discussion Questions

1. Jessie Ripoll of Jamaica and Mother Winifred Furlong represented two different cultural worlds, yet both were inspired by compassion for the poor. In your experience, are cultural and ethnic differences among community members resolved by sharing a gospel-inspired mission?

2. What is the history of prison ministry done by members of your regional community? Do you think something has been lost because fewer Sisters do this ministry today? Is there a substitute for it?

3. There are few disasters as wrenching as a fire which destroys buildings the Sisters labored to fund and construct. What are your memories of the community surviving disasters like this? How did we pull through it?

4. If we imaginatively reconstruct women's roles in early Christianity as part of a liberation movement, how does this affect our understanding of Mary in the gospels? How is Mary a liberator?

5. Compare your own ministry situation with the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene who were sent to "go back" to their neighbors in John's gospel.What are the points of sympathy you feel with these women?

6. Tell some stories about people you have invited to "come and see." What is it you understand that people are looking for when they show an interest in religious life, Mercy association, or one of our ministries?

7. From effects you witness, can you verify in your personal life, friendships or ministry that there is a relationship between prayer and healing? Do you consider yourself a healer in any sense?

The Cry of Rachel — The Voice of Jesus

Elaine Wainwright, R.S.M.

Introduction: Hearing the Cry Today

One of the questions which reverberates around our world is who do we say Jesus is as we seek to move out of patriarchy and beyond systems of oppression?[1] It is perhaps more a cry than a question as it rises up from the hearts of Christian women steeped in a tradition which has nourished their faith journey but which has also brought them to an awareness of how that same tradition has silenced women's voices and suppressed their experience. The cry goes up from women in situations of extreme oppression.[2] It is heard in theological classrooms and from many women in Christian churches throughout the world. The question is likewise being asked by feminist theologians attentive to the lives of women and to the articulation of the Christian tradition.[3]

Each of us who believes today has been shaped by the answers of our ancestors in the faith.

It is an urgent question since the way we answer it, the way we speak about Jesus within Christian discourse profoundly affects Christian praxis—liturgical, ministerial and all other. Elizabeth Johnson reiterates this when she says:

The answer to this question has not been academic...In personal faith and piety, in official doctrine, in liturgy, and in the way people actually live the answer is always a matter of faith. As the faith of a pilgrim people is always historically inculturated, disciples of every generation have answered the question in thought patterns and images familiar to them from their particular cultures....Each of us who believes today has been shaped by the answers of our ancestors in the faith.[4]

It becomes more urgent, therefore, when it is recognized that the historical inculturation of those answers has often been within systems of patriarchy and oppression.

Listening to the Voice/s

In this essay, I will offer a reading of one of the early chapters of Matthew's gospel which may provide a way of responding to the key question rather than a definitive answer. It will be based on two significant presuppositions. The first is the recognition that the gospel text with its intricate system of language and symbol shapes a particular consciousness in its readers. The second, which I wish to keep in close relationship to the first, is a belief, grounded in contemporary scholarly research, that different reading communities within the broad Matthean group would have received the story and hence characterized Jesus differently. These differences resulted from religious background, political perspective, class or status, ethnicity and gender. Such factors in turn shaped the house church which, as a community, received the gospel story, was shaped by it and in the context of oral reception, even shaped its subsequent performance.

The second chapter of Matthew's gospel consists of an interweaving of stories which link the birth and infancy of Jesus symbolically with that of Moses as recounted in the biblical text and developed in later popular Jewish traditions.[5] Links with the prophetic tradition and liberation motif begun in the previous story (1:18-25) are thus further developed. The characterization within the stories of chapter two is predominantly male. There is, however, repeated reference to the presence of Mary with the child (2:11, 13, 14, 20, 21) but both are passive within the actions initiated and effected by the male characters—the wise ones from the East, Herod and his retinue. In the symbolic universe which the narrative is constructing those who recognize and those who reject the child are male.

It is important to observe that in drawing on the Mosaic parallels for this story, the central role of both Hebrew and Egyptian women—Shiphrah and Puah, the mother and sister of Moses as well as the daughter of Pharaoh—in the Moses story, has been lost.[6] The continual reference to the mother with child may, however, serve as a warning that the patriarchal characterization of this woman as passive could represent an attempt to hide or to silence the active and courageously subversive role of women in the biblical tradition and subsequently in this biblical community.[7] The presence of the woman with the child in the house (2:11) where relationships and resources are reordered may well be passed over in a reading which makes the dominant narrative that of the male liberator or hero whom patriarchal tradition isolates and exalts. It functions symbolically, however within a narrative of a liberation movement in which women are key participants together with men.

The story of the visit of the magoi from the East creates a number of rhetorical tensions which provide the ground for alternative re-readings. These strange visitors from the East are gentiles who come in search of the new liberator whose birth was heralded by a star and whom they designated by the title "king of the Judeans." Their recognition of the signs surrounding the birth of a great liberator is contrasted with or com-

plements Herod's appeal to the biblical historical/ prophetic traditions as the source of knowledge of the liberator and the location in which this liberator could be found. They are aligned with the faithful family, Mary and Joseph, and unlike their political counterparts, they recognize the one whom they call "king."[8]

These astrologers would have represented for many readers the wisdom of the East. It would have generally been seen as the wisdom of the elite, of the courts and of the scribal schools, rather than of the homes and the villages. It is this wisdom, however, which visits the child born of the woman who has conceived outside the confines of the law. This must have been heard as a subversive story for those steeped in Israel's wisdom tradition which began in the homes and villages but was taken into the schools and the public arena of men during the Hellenistic era. Elite wisdom now returns to the house where woman and child are found. A reversal of values and a breaking open of ideologies characterize the world this narrative constructs for some of its readers. Such a reversal would be received differently by those without religious, political or social power compared with the powerful whom the tradition supported.

If one of the aspects of this movement was a realignment of relationships between women and men, then her (Mary's) presence could foreshadow and represent such realignment.

The hint of the wisdom tradition at this point in the story may have had symbolic links for some readers with the Emmanuel reference heard in 1:23. The formulaic quotation clearly evokes the prophetic tradition of Isaiah. The narrator's translation of the name Emmanuel as "God with us" may, however, have recalled for some listeners and/or readers those Wisdom songs in which Sophia sang of her delight to be with the human community (Prov 8:22-31, especially v. 31), her setting up of her dwelling place in Jacob, being established in Zion (Sir 24:8-12), her appearance on earth and dwelling with humankind (Bar 3:37). And even if such connections were not made by any members of the first century reading community, it is possible for us as twentieth century readers to make and develop them.[9]

Such a characterization of Jesus in relation to Sophia or Wisdom becomes more explicit later in Matthew (11:19). Here, however, we can raise the question as to what it might mean to take the wisdom mythology in which wisdom, the key character who speaks and who acts, is portrayed as female and to make it one interpretive key for a story whose central character is male. For Amy-Jill Levine and others, it means the displacement of the female who is at the center of the wisdom myth.[10] The story can be read, however, not as a male hero narrative but rather as that of the community into which Jesus is born or that of the reign-of-God movement which preserved its memory of him. In this reading, the decentering or displacement, and the gender incongruence may function to shift reader attention from an individual to a community. In this prophetic community into which Jesus is born, wisdom is present, the divine is present and this characterizes the community.

The magoi may also have signified alternative liberation or resistance traditions, those which originated among the aristocracy in the East in contrast to the popular resistance movements of first-century Palestine. Both pose a threat to Herod and Rome and they interlock within the Matthean story.[11] Horsley notes the reversal or the irony being played out in the narrative when he says: "...far from the restoration of the great Persian kingship in all its splendor for which they had long propagandized, the Magi now take the initiative in revealing that the hoped-for liberation from foreign domination has begun in this birth in a little town in the tiny principality of Judea."[12] This may well be indicative of the way the narrative was shaped by a resistance community within Roman Palestine or on the margins of Judaism, to provide a foundational narrative for their following of Jesus, their community or house church ethos.

A child is called the Christos, the one who is claimed as fulfillment of the prophetic hope for a new Davidic figure who would liberate Israel from foreign domination. The powerless child is called "king" and "ruler" but is contrasted with the might of the Herodian machinery. As the scene closes, the magoi enter the house, see the child with Mary and they do obeisance to this awaited deliverer by offering gifts. Once again, a contrast. The scene is not in the palaces or fortresses of Jerusalem or the many other cities secured by Herod or in the palaces of the East. The origin of this liberation movement is in a "house," the location, noted by Crosby, which is the key metaphor in the Matthean gospel.[13]

It is here, in the house, that relationships are realigned when aristocrats acknowledge a child and resources are shared. The rich give to an ordinary Judean family which represents the majority of Jewish families impoverished by Herodian, Roman and temple taxation. It was indeed the house in which this new resistance movement spread among the variety of social groupings who gathered in houses across the Graeco-Roman world to remember and to proclaim what God was doing in and through the birth, the life,

the death and the resurrection of this Jesus. The presence of Mary in the house for this paradigmatic scene may have had a two-fold effect. On the one hand, it may have functioned to underscore the patriarchal norm of the mother's role as nurturer and carer, a role undertaken within the private space of the household. On the other hand, given the reversals already inherent in the scene, the reference to Mary may have supplemented the subversive aspects of her story apparent in the previous chapter. She may have recalled for readers women's participation in that social resistance that was part of the Jesus movement. If one of the aspects of this movement was a realignment of relationships between women and men, then her presence could foreshadow and represent such realignment.

The two scenes which follow this extraordinary story are patterned on the two great paradigmatic events in Israel's story—the Exodus and the Exile as indicated by the prophetic verses associated with them.[14] Even though they had been incorporated into Israel's sacred story and given significant theological meaning, they were both highly political events and the stories which developed around them became resistance stories.

. . . (Jesus') birth story is interpreted in relation to the greatest act of God's deliverance of a people in Israel's story . . .

Like Israel, Jesus goes down into Egypt, is rescued from there by God, and is called "son" by the divine parent of Hosea 11:1, the text used in Matthew 2:15. While Jesus is not portrayed in this section of the infancy narrative as a deliverer, his birth story is interpreted in relation to the greatest act of God's deliverance of a people in Israel's story and supplements the reference to Jesus' future salvific role (Matt1:22). As we have seen previously, it would seem that there are at least two possible rhetorical effects of this story. One is the continuation of the hero narrative which focuses on Jesus and links him in birth to the great liberator, Moses, who was the instrument through whom God called God's beloved one, Israel, out of Egypt.[15] As the foundational narrative of a community of resistance, the evangelist's linking of Jesus with his mother, even though she is rendered passive, may recall the women who were agents of liberation in the biblical narrative of Exodus. Jesus is, therefore, metaphorically linked to the community which is working out its liberation from oppression, that inclusive community designated in the generic language of "son" as the narrator draws on the Hosean text (Hos 11:1). If, however, readers recall the more extensive Hosean text evoked by this verse, they will draw into this text the maternal imagery which characterizes Hosea 11:1-4. Images in tension allow for alternative readings.

Herod's slaying of the innocent children is metaphorically linked to the children of Israel who were led north out of the city on their way to exile. Rachel, the ancient mother of Israel whose tomb was located in the region around Bethlehem, is imaged by Jeremiah weeping for her children who suffered such grievous political degradation: A voice is heard in Ramah (the northern outskirts of Jerusalem) wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more (Jer 31:15). There is an extraordinary contrast here between the two representations of Bethlehem at the beginning and end of the action set in motion by the arrival of the wise ones from the East. In 2:5-6, the chief priests and scribes, bureaucrats of the Jerusalem political system, cite the prophet Micah who longs for a ruler like David who shall come forth from David's city, Bethlehem, to shepherd or to rule Israel. As the story draws to a close, the narrator evokes the prophet Jeremiah to link Bethlehem not with the political David but with the weeping woman, Rachel, both of whom represent Israel. While the text stands in the narrative, sounding a note of the finality of death of the infants slain by Herod, the poem which it recalls for its hearers goes on to speak in the voice of God who has compassion of the womb on those exiled (Jer 31:20), and who is bringing about a reversal imaged in gender terms: a woman encompasses or protects a man (Jer. 31:22).[16]

Once again, it is possible to hear the narrative not in terms of an isolated child whose birth narrative presents in miniature the life to follow. Rather, from the outset, the birth of Jesus is located in the context of a community and the reversal of societal structures that is representative of God's way for humanity symbolized in and through the story of Israel. There are hints, slight though these may be, that one aspect of this reversal is related to gender roles and structures as well as both class and ethnic differences. Such hints provide those brief fissures in the fabric of the patriarchal narrative which may have enabled some first century readers and which can certainly enable contemporary readers to take up an alternative reading position. This is not just a reading against the grain of the patriarchal narrative but a different voice which constructs a different symbolic universe. Resistant readers are also agents of resistance to the dominant narrative and the symbolic universe it constructed in the past and constructs in the present.

From the particular perspective taken in this study, it can be seen that male power is decentered within certain readings of this second chapter of Matthew's gospel. The infant Jesus is linked with the presence of

the woman Mary, designated in the text as "his mother" but evocative of those women whose stories evoke female resistance to patriarchal power. He is attended by wise ones from the East, resistance figures who challenge political hegemony. Metaphorically he is linked to Israel, the community imaged as "son" and as community of gender reversal in which woman surrounds man. Indeed, it could be suggested that we can read Matthew's second chapter as the birth story, not of an individual but of a movement, a movement which could be characterized as one where God is present to bring people liberation and salvation.

From such a reading of one short chapter of one gospel story, it is clear that there is no simple answer to the question about who Jesus is on our journey out of patriarchy and beyond oppression. It is clear, however, that reading with an awareness of the myriad forms of injustice can enable us to hear not only the dominant but also the subversive narratives within the story of Jesus. We may indeed hear the weeping voice of Rachel as the voice of Jesus today.

Footnotes

1. "Who Do You Say I Am? Christology in Women's Voices," was the title of the conference whose papers are gathered together in the collection edited by Maryanne Stevens, Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology (New York: Paulist, 1993). The essays in this volume make it clear that feminist perspectives can no longer be limited to a gender critique but must take account of race, ethnicity and class as well as their effect on history. Other studies in feminist christology extend the lens of oppression to religious affiliation and sexual preference.
2. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye, eds., With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 108-117; Chung Hyun Kyung, Struggle to Be Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991); Anne Pattel-Gray, "Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal Womanist Critique of Australian Church Feminism," in Freedom and Entrapment, edited by Maryanne Confoy and Dorothy Lee (Melbourne: Collins-Dove, 1995); Ursula King, ed. Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader (London: SPCK, 1994); and Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, eds. The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), to name but a few of those voices.
3. The most recent publication addressing this question is Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology (New York: Continuum, 1994).
4. Elizabeth A. Johnson, Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 4.
5. John Dominic Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 10-15, outlines the parallels in detail.
6. J. Cheryl Exum, ""You Shall Let Every Daughter Live": A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10," Semeia 28 (1983): 63-82; and Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows," Bible Review 5 (1989): 14-25, 34, study the women characters in the beginning of the Exodus narrative.
7. Jopie Siebert-Hommes, "But if She be a Daughter...She May Live! 'Daughters' and 'Sons' in Exodus 1-2," in A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy, edited by Athalya Brenner, 62-74 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), discusses how literally and figuratively the daughters of Exodus 1-2 surround and preserve the life of the child or "hold the saviour's head above water." For a study of female characters in the Matthean narrative and a reconstruction of its community of reception focussed on its female membership, see my Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel according to Matthew, BZNW 60 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991).
8. Amy Jill Levine, The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 14 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988), examines the comparisons and contrasts in this section of the story much more comprehensively than is possible here.
9. The process or method being recommended here is that of intertextuality. It recognizes that no text is independent but carries with it traces of other texts heard or read.
10. Amy Jill Levine, "Feminist Food for Thought: The Leavening of the Q Community," Paper delivered at the 1992 SBL Conference, 10.
11. See Richard A. Horsley, The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 39-60.
12. Horsley, Liberation, 59.
13. Michael Crosby, House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 38-48.
14. Janice Capel Anderson, Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again. JSNTSS 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 53, says of these and other fulfillment texts that they provide a "context for interpreting the events of Jesus' life and... an aid in establishing Jesus' identity and character."
15. Such an interpretation continues in the work of Dale C. Allison, The New Moses: A Matthean Typology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 141, who says of "the story of the exodus" that it "is the story of Moses" [emphasis mine].
16. Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, Overtures to Biblical (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), discusses this poem as well as the complexity of translation of the language in its closing verses. It should be noted here that this image of the weeping woman Rachel may be evoked for the reader later in the narrative when Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem.

Two Forgotten Disciples in the Gospel of John

Judith Schubert, R.S.M.

The importance of woman can be traced to the very first chapter of the bible. Genesis1 relates how God completed the creation of the world with the formation of both "male and female," both of whom were made in the divine image (Gn 1:27). At the end of the story God looked upon the beauty of the divine handiwork, especially the creation of women and men, and saw that "it was very good" (Gn 1:27, 31). The climax of the powerful creation story alone assures the reader of the precious worth of each person.

Catherine McAuley, a student of scripture, faithfully followed God's word in her untiring work to dignify the life of human beings.In particular, we remember her deep interest in the neglected Catholic girls and women of her time. The prominence that she bestowed on women set an example for all her daughters, the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine's example has affected us in the Institute as we show a preference for the plight of women both in our mission statement and in our ministries: "We carry out our mission of mercy guided by . . . Catherine McAuley's preferential love for the poor and her special concern for women."[1] In the light of these statements let us take the opportunity to "re-search," i.e., search again for ourselves, two biblical passages about women.

Women as chosen followers of Jesus represent one of the major biblical topics that has been neglected throughout the centuries

In recent years the status of women as disciples of Jesus has evoked much discussion. Women as chosen followers of Jesus represent one of the major biblical topics that has been neglected throughout the centuries. Unfortunately, during this time familiar biblical passages about women have been seen through patriarchal eyes. Such passages have been interpreted in a way that overlooks the importance of the woman; interpreters have only partially understood women's significance. Until a few years ago, the topic of women as disciples of Jesus was rarely treated. More recently, biblical scholars have uncovered many scriptural texts about women that have been previously overlooked, partially read or neglected.

With this in mind let us turn our attention to the Gospel of John and consider the roles of two women, namely the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 and Mary Magdalene in John 20. My purpose in this article is to demonstrate that the evangelist does indeed present the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene as disciples of Jesus. This role has relevance for women today. Before we embark on a re-evaluation of these Johanannine texts, let us first consider the meaning of discipleship in the gospel.

The Meaning of "Disciple"

The Greek term, mathetes , translates as the word "disciple."[2] Throughout the New Testament the term usually refers to a follower of Jesus.[3] Although the disciple's relationship to Jesus or to one another is not always clear, a disciple often is characterized in the Gospels as one who has been called by Jesus to leave the past and follow him in some way. The initiative for the call belongs to Jesus alone.

In John's Gospel the term "disciple" appears at least nine times.[4] Although the evangelist does not specifically apply this technical term to women, both the Samaritan woman in John 4 and Mary Magdalene in John 20 certainly fall under its definition.[5] Significantly, as "disciples" the two women not only follow the call of Jesus faithfully, but they also go far beyond themselves to share the "good news" with others in their communities.

The subject of discipleship appears at the beginning of John's Gospel. In John 1:39 Jesus begins to call disciples to Himself with the famous Johannine phrase, "Come and see." Through this formula Jesus offers life to them. If they accept his invitation, they will be changed by Jesus forever.

After the call of the disciples in John 1 but before the introduction of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, the evangelist presents a contrast about a religious leader who is not yet prepared for discipleship. In John 3 Nicodemus the Pharisee becomes fascinated with Jesus. The religious leader comes secretly ("by night") to discuss particular issues with Jesus such birth and rebirth. Jesus devotes precious time to the Pharisaic leader by addressing his questions. Nevertheless, Nicodemus, with all his rabbinic expertise, seems only to argue or question Jesus further. He never quite hears the deeper meaning of Jesus' words of invitation. In effect, Nicodemus cannot yet take the extra step to follow Jesus openly because he does not believe. After much dialogue, Jesus even questions him: "If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?" (Jn 3:12).

The Samaritan Woman As Disciple

In contrast to Nicodemus, the evangelist presents an unlikely candidate in John 4:4-31 to fulfill the role of a true disciple of Jesus: a woman of Samaria. She

exemplifies true discipleship through her intimate sharing with Jesus, her profound change after her discussion with him, and her readiness to expose herself to the ridicule of others. Despite the cost to herself, the woman shared the "good news" with the townspeople so that they, too, would have the opportunity to encounter Jesus.

The story takes place at Jacob's well in Sychar, which was thought to date back to the patriarch Jacob's purchase of it (Gn 33:19). In the time of Jesus the land formed part of the region of Samaria. The Samaritans were descendants from the inhabitants of the former northern kingdom of Israel.When the Assyrians captured the north in 721 B.C.E., they brought foreigners into the land, some of whom the Israelites eventually married (see 2 Kgs 17). Although the Samaritans thought themselves to be true Israelites, the Jews of the first century considered them defiled because of their marital lineage and religious beliefs which departed from mainstream Judaism. Tension existed between the two peoples to the point that Jews did not associate with Samaritans.

The scene in John 4 becomes more strained when we notice that Jesus the Jew not only initiates a conversation with a Samaritan but also with a woman. Through this dialogue Jesus breaks the boundaries of acceptable social behavior. Equally unusual is the point that the woman does not flee or ignore Jesus' conversation. On the contrary she responds openly with a question and continues to dialogue with Jesus. Her curiosity provides the opportunity for intellectual and religious conversation. The courage of both Jesus and the independent woman provides the occasion for a marvelous drama to unfold.

As a result of their trust in one another, Jesus and the woman can freely seek and discuss water in its literal and metaphorical meanings, as well as move to topics such as Jewish-Samaritan relations, their biblical ancestry, and even the woman's marital state. When the deeply affected woman expresses that she anticipates the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus discloses that "I am he, the one who is speaking with you" (Jn 4:26). At this moment of the heart-felt exchange the woman's life changes; she becomes Jesus' disciple. The woman leaves the well and returns to the city to proclaim Jesus to fellow Samaritans.

In this unusual drama the woman represents the first person in John's Gospel whom Jesus asks to provide for his needs. More importantly, she is the first person to whom Jesus announces his Messiahship. He shares deeply with the woman because she becomes open and receptive towards him. Simultaneously, Jesus' respect toward the woman touches her heart. Despite her unusual personal history, Jesus accepts the woman where she presently stands in her life. However, while his attitude is clearly delineated, how do the inhabitants of the Samaritan city of Sychar treat her? To understand the relationship between the woman and the people, let us ponder some of the unusual circumstances of the scene.

The Relationship Between the Samaritan Woman and Her Neighbors

Recall how the evangelist tells at the outset of the story that the encounter took place at noon time (Jn 4:6). This remains an unlikely time for women to draw water from the well because of the intense heat of the midday sun and the fact that water was needed early in the day for household chores. The evangelist does not offer an explanation for her presence at the well during this hour. However, when Jesus comments later in the story that the woman has been married five times and presently lives with a man who is not her husband (Jn 4:18), it seems as if the woman indeed may have been shunned by her neighbors and inhabitants of the city.[6]

This suggestion becomes more credible when, after the open dialogue with Jesus, the changed woman went back to the city and in the attempt to convince the people to stop their activities and follow her advice, she declares,"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" (Jn 4:29). While the inhabitants ordinarily may not have listened to her general invitation to meet Jesus, they surely would have been curious about any "extra curricular" activities of the woman.

. . . Jesus' prayer for his disciples clearly includes the faithful Samaritan woman.

With probable strained relations between the woman and her neighbors, the actions of the woman demonstrate even further her courage and ability to risk. When the woman left Jesus at the well and returned to the city to inform the people about Jesus, the woman exceeds her own call of discipleship to share the "good news" to others. In her case the others probably included neighbors who had treated her unkindly or ignored her. Perhaps they even excluded her from frequent communal gatherings such as the daily social exchanges at the well. Despite the great personal cost to her, the woman reached out to people who may have ridiculed her credibility in the past and bravely shares her new found treasure with them.

Furthermore, the actions of the Samaritan woman in Jn 4 identify her as the first person in John's Gospel, who, like Jesus, preaches the "good news" to a community. While Jesus began to choose his disciples in John 1, they did not go out to share the gospel message with any groups. Moreover, in John 3 the

Pharisee Nicodemus could not bring himself to risk his position with his colleagues and identify with Jesus. Not until this story of the Samaritan woman in John 4 do we find someone brave enough to invite a group of people in the community to "come, see" (Jn 4:29). This welcomed request models the words of Jesus in his call of the disciples in John 1:39.

Much to her delight the Samaritans of her city did "believe in him [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony" (Jn 4:39). According to Raymond Brown, this verse is quite significant because it appears later in the priestly prayer as Jesus pleads for his disciples in John 17:20[7]: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me because of their word." The similarity of the two verses is striking: in John 4:39 the evangelist describes the influence of the Samaritan woman's words upon the people and in John 17:20 Jesus prays for his disciples and all who will believe in him because of their word. From the comparison of these two biblical texts Jesus' prayer for his disciples clearly includes the faithful Samaritan woman. She is the first one to bring a group to believe in Jesus through the words she spoke. She exhibits a wholehearted response to Jesus' call of discipleship.

The esteem bestowed by the evangelist upon a marginalized Samaritan woman unmistakably marks her as a true disciple of Jesus.

While the woman proceeded to the city to call forth her neighbors, Jesus tells his disciples,"I sent (apostellein) you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (Jn 4:38). The term, apostellein, represents the verb form of "apostle," which means one who is sent. When Jesus employs familiar language such as "labor, reaping, sowing, etc.," he refers to mission.[8] In this narrative, the Samaritan woman does the work for the harvest; the male disciples are not yet ready. If it were not for her missionary efforts the seed may have never been sown to the Samaritans. Long before her male counterparts, then, the woman alone shares with the larger community the gift of life that she has been given. The esteem bestowed by the evangelist upon a marginalized Samaritan woman unmistakably marks her as a true disciple of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene: Another True Disciple of Jesus

Mary Magdalene represents another woman in John's Gospel who unquestionably functions as a disciple of Jesus.[9] While the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4 occurs during the earthly ministry of Jesus, the narrative about Mary Magdalene in John 20:1-18 takes place immediately after the resurrection. From her tender encounter with the risen Jesus in John 20, we shall see how the evangelist ranks Mary as another true disciple of Jesus.

From the time of Jesus' arrest and up until his death, the men either disappear from the gospel scene or, in the case of Peter in the high priest's courtyard, deny any association with Jesus. According to the evangelist, the Beloved Disciple is the only exception; he remains with Jesus. Unlike the men, who may have feared getting crucified along with Jesus, the women stay close to him at immense risk for their safety. At the foot of the cross we find Jesus' "mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (Jn 19:25). Whereas the desertion of the men, except for the Beloved Disciple, permeates the Passion narrative, the women rank as outstanding examples of discipleship. Unfortunately, scholars have until recently ignored this significant fact, rendering the women invisible witnesses to the crucifixion.

Mary's Arrival at the Tomb

After the crucifixion Mary Magdalene's role becomes highlighted in her encounter with the risen Jesus.[10] In John 20:1-11 Mary makes two trips to the tomb early on Sunday morning. When she first arrives, she noticed the stone rolled back and the empty tomb. Immediately, she returned to Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple to report her discovery. The three of them returned to the tomb and the two men verified what Mary had said about the empty tomb. However, they did not see Jesus. Although the men returned to the safety of their homes (Jn 20:10), Mary remained at the tomb and wept.

In her saddened state (Jn 20:11-15) Mary looked into the tomb and encountered two angels, who questioned her weeping. After she responded to them, she turned and encountered Jesus but did not recognize him. Lack of recognition permeates post-resurrection stories in the gospels.[11] When Jesus asked the same question as the angels,"Why are you weeping?" Mary indicates her desire to locate the body of Jesus: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." At this moment, Jesus tenderly calls out,"Mary!"

Here the identification by name suggests a very intimate and important relationship between Jesus and Mary. Earlier in the gospel Jesus explains the value of calling one by name. In Jon 10:3-5, 14, 16 he narrates the story of the sheep, who know the Master by the sound of his voice. The Master even calls the sheep by name because they belong to him. When he uses Mary's name in John 20:16, " the risen one reveals himself to one who seeks and believes."[12] Jesus' familiarity with Mary suggests a bond of discipleship.

Additionally, for the deity to call one by name reflects another tradition in the bible, when God's chooses a leader for the people at a particular moment of history.[13] In this story Mary stands as both disciple and leader.

When Carla Ricci compares the call of Mary with the discourse of the sheep in John 10, she makes an additional observation. Besides his comment on the calling by name of the sheep, Jesus also proclaims, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . I lay down my life in order to take it up again" (Jn 10:11,17). Ricci states that Jesus' call to Mary by name "is another meeting, between life and death, between losing and finding, between giving and receiving oneself (laying down one's life and taking it up again), between sorrow and joy."[14]

Mary's recognition of Jesus' call identifies her as his disciple.

Jesus' call, therefore, must have aroused many strong feelings in Mary. As she prepared to encounter death in her search for the body of Jesus, he stands before her unexpectedly in radiant glory! Upon hearing her name called Mary's deep sorrow turns to surprise and happiness. More importantly, Mary's recognition of Jesus' call identifies her as his disciple.

Mary's Response to Jesus

At the sound of Jesus' call to Mary, she answers "Rabbouni!" ("my master/teacher"). Her excited reply marks her readiness to continue to follow the call of post-resurrection discipleship. Jesus, who has been rejected by other disciples during his passion and death, prepares for the future through women like Mary. This point is realized in 20:17b when Jesus commands Mary: "Go to my brothers and say to them."[15] Immediately the disciple Mary takes on the added role of an apostle.

While the term "apostle" does not appear in John's Gospel, it is helpful to note that, according to the developed Pauline tradition (as implied in 1 Cor 9:1f; 15:8-11), an "apostle" of Jesus is described as one who has seen the risen Lord and then shares the gospel with others. Mary Magdalene fulfills such requirements. According to this Pauline tradition, then, she functions as an "apostle." In fact, since the risen Jesus sends her to the other disciples/apostles, she becomes in effect their apostle! Accordingly, Mary acquires the responsibility to instruct the others.

How does Mary cope with such trust? When the risen Jesus commands her to "Go . . . and say," she obediently leaves Jesus to return to the disciples. Upon arrival Mary announces jubilantly, "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20:18b). In only two verses Mary has moved from identifying Jesus as "Teacher/Master" to "the Lord." This progression of titles expresses her profound realization of the sacred events before her eyes. As Mary carries the first message of the risen Lord to his other disciples, she speaks with great assurance and jubilation. As a result of Mary's response, the other followers of Jesus are gifted with the glorious news about the risen Jesus.

Conclusion

From a reading of the stories about the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4) and Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb (Jn 20) it becomes quite evident that Jesus' views about women differed greatly from those of society. Jesus' decision to choose these two women to carry out his mission breaks many social boundaries concerning the role of women in the community. Jesus' placement of the two women as "first" in a series of missionary activities clearly emphasizes their prominence and responsibility. Furthermore, his choice places great responsibility upon these two women. In a world where women were kept at home, these two were not. In a world that did not deem women as credible witnesses, Jesus chose them to witness to himself. In a world where men made the decisions, these women were called to acts as leaders.

From the above comments we see that both the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene function as model disciples and as spokespersons for the early Christian communities. The important roles of these two biblical figures of the first century fortify us as religious in the twentieth century and remind us of our rich heritage of women leaders in the Church. With their courage then, let us, in the tradition of Catherine McAuley, work to affect systemic change in the lives of women.

"and God saw everything . . . and indeed, it was very good" (Gn 1:31)

Footnotes

1. *Constitutions* Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 6.
2 For further discussion on "disciple" refer to H. Weder, "Disciple," Vol 2 of the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed by D. N. Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 207-210.
3. In other instances "disciple" may occasionally refer to another figure, e.g., a disciple of John (Jn 1:35), of Moses (Jn 9:28), or of the Pharisees (Mt 22:16).
4. Jn 9:28; 18:15-16; 19:26-27, 38; 20:2-4, 8; 21:7, 20, 23f. In all instances "disciple" refers to men.
5. E. S. Fiorenza remarks, discipleship in John's Gospel has its "focus on the motif of altruistic love and service," *In Memory of Her*, (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 323.
6. J. Schubert, "A Formula for Friendship," *Bible Today* 32:2 (March 1994), 89.
7. R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 187.
8. *Ibid.*, 189.
9. J. Grassi even describes Mary Magdalene as the "coun-

terpart of the Beloved Disciple" in John's Gospel (*The Hidden Heroes of the Gospels*, [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989]126-131).
10. In the Synoptic Gospels, a group of women appear in the Resurrection narrative of the empty tomb (Mk 16:1-8; Mt 28:1-10; Lk 24:1-11). However, in John's Gospel Mary Magdalene alone finds the empty tomb. The reduction of characters in John's story demonstrates the evangelist's attraction to dialogues between individuals
11. E.g., Lk 24:13-35, 36-41; Jn 21:4.
12. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol 3, (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 317.
13. E.g., Ex 3:4; Jer 15:16.
14. C. Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 143.
15. In the first part of this verse, Jesus says to Mary: "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father." The meaning of these words have been interpreted many ways. R. Schnackenburg (John, Vol 3, 318) suggests that it simply may be associated with the need to bring Jesus' message quickly to the others. R. Brown proposes another interpretation: "It is a theological statement contrasting the passing nature of Jesus' presence in his post-resurrectional appearances and the permanent nature of his presence in the Spirit." (John, Vol 2, [New York: Doubleday, 1970], 1015). P. Perkins associates Mary's holding on to Jesus with the act of worship (John, [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978], 234).

Contributors

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Inviting as a Way of Mercy

Marianne Hieb, R.S.M.

The theme and dynamic of inviting has been with me lately since the challenge was put to us as the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy to think about the possible ways that we invite others to join us in Mercy. As a member of a formation community for the past ten years, I have an active interest and a history of wonderings about this theme. In these years, I shared in the forming of community with a variety of groups who together have experienced mystery, awe, confusion, pain, giftedness, loss, inappropriate expectations and behaviors, resistance, support, healing, inability, frailty, frustration, anger, laughter, humility, growth, and above all, grace in mercy and mercy in grace.

. . . do I invite the people that I live with to become their most authentic selves?

In the midst of living in a formation community, I celebrated my silver jubilee, a time that, much to my surprise, became revelatory of some shadow places that had companioned me during these twenty-five years. In preparation for the jubilee celebration, we who had entered together (originally forty-five, now ten), shared about the Biblical themes of a year of jubilee: fidelity, gratitude, and reconciliation. I found that in opening myself up to a gratitude which was very real, and to the celebratory aspects of fidelity, the challenge and resistance to reconciliation became my inevitable companion. Gradually, I became more aware of the invitation to reconciliation in a life of mercy.

In some ways, two places of invitation that Jesus holds out to us in Scripture began to image for me some of my own journey and some of our communal challenge to inviting. There are eras in which Jesus says, "Follow me." There are other times that receive his invitation,"Come and see."

"Follow" has held such significance for us in our spiritual, vocational, and ministerial history. This for years was the touchstone of my fidelity: how I respond to the call of Jesus to follow him.

When I follow, what will happen may be a mystery but I continue along the path. There is a set path that I am to traverse. I may not know what it is, but Jesus, the inviter, the one who goes before , does indeed know.

"Come and see" implies a different kind of accompanying, a companioning, a presence, and a non-judgmental adventure that will yield its own discernment. When I come and see, I walk, I observe, I am drawn into, I make judgments, I sense intuitions, I am subjectively present to the terrain. Jesus can ask me at the end of the day, "What did you see today?" "And when they came back and told him all that they had done..."

Perhaps the more common meaning of invitation and response to religious life, which was my experience in the late '60s, was one of "follow." At that time, there were still sufficient structures, and rules, dependable and predictable ways of doing things. One could hope to receive a formula for the holy life. The invitation of today may contain more of the elements of "Come and see. "That is why inviting has become so significant to us as we move forward in the present and future experience of religious life.

If a woman answers the invitation to Mercy, to come and see, my inviting her as a member of that community has just begun. Am I prepared to invite her not just to this life, but to its concrete unfolding? Is there a place for her to continue to become herself? Into what reality does she come? What does she see?

How can I know the answers to these questions? The only real way to get some perspective on this is to see if I am a person, if we are a community already in the process of inviting. What is our history of inviting as we gaze at our community life, at our life of shared faith, shared prayer, shared ministry, shared support? How creative are we as we adapt to the necessities of members ministering or living alone? How committed are we to resisting competition, to avoiding judgment, not allowing "the sun to go down on our anger"? In short, are we committed to live the legacy of union and charity as these treasures of Catherine's would be recognizable today?

Am I capable of, and do I invite the people that I live with to become their most authentic selves? Am I delighted by their successes, can I further their accomplishments, can I create a safe place where we can share life, be vulnerable, bring before each other our inadequacies? Can I invite in the spirit of the Scriptures, in the context of our charism?

If I cannot do that in the context of my lived experience now, I cannot invite others to come and see. There must be a space to come to; there must be something lifegiving to see. The gospel records a story about an invitation:

Simon invited Jesus to a meal. When Jesus arrived at the house and took his place at table, suddenly a woman came in. She had heard that Jesus was dining with Simon, and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses, and anointed them with the ointment...

Jesus then turned to the woman and said to Simon, "You see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured

out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment..." (Luke 7:36-38, 44-46)

Jesus was invited. He traveled to this person's home in expectation, we suppose, of a meal and some social interaction. He was accorded none of the expected courtesies. No footwashing was offered him. He experienced a contradiction in terms: hospitality somehow verbally extended but not carried out in a ritual way. What he was led to expect and what happened were two different things.

When I invite you to the banquet, I must be willing to continue the ritual . . .

Some of the disturbing elements of this gospel passage nudge me as I consider my questions about inviting people to join community. It is not just the invitation. More importantly, it is what occurs once a person responds to the invitation. What is the level of readiness that I can provide in terms of the whole experience of the meal? Will the person arrive, as Jesus did, and receive the promised meal, but know herself, himself as alienated because of withholding of the rituals that would put a person at ease? We hear Jesus' clear declaration of disappointment from the lack he experienced and yet we also hear his surprise at receiving from an unexpected source of hospitality as the woman bends over him, her tears and her luxuriant hair providing a way of service that the person who was the official host had withheld.

We go to those places in our own history where we sense, accurately or mistakenly, that the community in which we have cast our lot for life withheld from us gestures of hospitality, rituals to which we had a right by virtue of being invited. These wounds can remain unhealed. In order to be people who can invite, we need to revisit our history, be honest in encountering those places, and begin the task of letting them go, of inviting reconciliation.Equally important is the task of identifying those unexpected places of grace, sources of life, support, affirmation, healing that came to us seemingly unbidden, from an unexpected and perhaps unlikely or even questionable source.

Who was this "woman," this symbolic presence, who came instead, and poured grace upon us, even as we sought that grace elsewhere? This is God's own design, God's "come and see," breaking into our rigid and righteous expectations with lavish abandon and a largesse unable to be denied.

And so, we as community members invite each other and invite our selves. We invite ourselves to grow, to heal, to come to the banquet. We invite ourselves to identify the rich times when our hopes were indeed fulfilled, but from a different source than from the community. The woman who knelt before Jesus and bathed his feet with her tears was a vehicle for the same hospitality that was withheld by the inviter. This synchronicity has come into our own lives as well. In the midst of knowing poverty, and the paucity of response from a legitimate source, some other place of givenness arises in our lives, and the ritual of inviting, of offering hospitality, is accomplished.

Catherine invited with enthusiasm those people whose lives she touched. She invited people to come home to themselves, to their truest self, whether the invitation was to the women who shared ministry with her, or to those whom she perceived herself and her companions serving. For those with her in ministry she had a gift to free their yearnings and their talents to help the poor. She invited her beloved poor to places of dignity, safety, fulfillment, and skill. Catherine's original invitation to her companions was one of joining her in service to the poor in Dublin. This was a clear and unambiguous direction that all the events of her life led up to, converged on, carved out.

Many of the women and men and couples who express interest in joining us in this season of Mercy are already deeply committed to service, and are functioning as well-trained, experienced professionals in any number of capacities. What seems to draw them is a desire for community, an affirmation of a faith perspective and the spiritual life, a support around prayer, and the possibility of sharing the awe, struggle, pain and joy they encounter in their ministries. Through Mercy, they are seeking a context to explore and honor these actions of God in the world. That call seems to be at the heart of mercy as we move forward. We must also learn to discern the invitation that is being held out to us as a community as we engage in inviting others. We are the inheritors of an intricate combination of "follow me" and of "come and see." We search out our willingness to be at the heart of the mystery, and to work toward integration. We stand at the threshold of this place in the history of religious life. How can we be relentlessly honest with our willingness to embark, not just on a task of inviting, but a life of inviting? How do we continue to create a "come and see" space for our own souls and for the lives of those with whom we live?

When I invite you to the banquet, I must be willing to continue the ritual, until you are bathed and toweled dry, fed, acknowledged, honored, entertained, introduced, made at home, appreciated, seen and heard. If I do not, I am not really inviting. Inviting is the abiding continuity of hospitality; it is the ritual enacted in its fullness, it is mercy experienced and revealed at its most dynamic place of lived giving and receiving.

To Cure Often, To Heal Always

Joanne Marie Andiorio, R.S.M.

A young man, dressed in sandals and a toga-like garment, weary from his travels, walks across the front of the chapel and takes a seat next to a large bubbling well of cool water. He wants to rest a spell before continuing on his journey into Samaria. It is noon and it is hot. While he sits there, a lovely woman with a blue shawl on her head and shoulders, comes through the chapel with a large empty water jug in her hand. She approaches the well on her way to filling her jug with water ignoring the man until he says to her, "Give me a drink." Her face registers great surprise at his request. She says, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman for a drink?" He replies, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The Samaritan woman and the man continue their conversation. The woman is amazed by what he knows about her. She listens to his words, is obviously moved by his message of life giving water, and a bit taken back by his gentle prodding about her five husbands. She is astounded at his disclosure that he is the Messiah! Unable to keep this amazing experience to herself, she turns to the community gathered for this Sunday liturgy and speaks to them as she spoke to her community in Samaria. "Come and see the one who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah? Come and see!" (Jn4:4-41)

Using the gifts within the assembly which gathers for the weekend liturgies at Mercy Hospital, this familiar gospel was dramatized by a narrator and two members of Mercy Hospital's Ministry of Healing liturgy community. In this form of proclamation we not only heard the words of scripture, but also saw, felt and experienced the relationship, the emotion and the message in a more wholistic way as we engaged our senses and were transported to the town of Samaria. In this drama, we became part of the event rather than passive listeners. We understood that Jesus was speaking to us, today, not just to the Samaritan woman of a bygone era.

Perhaps one might find such a liturgical setting in a parish or academic community, but it is unusual to find it within a hospital setting. Mercy Hospital is a large urban, tertiary teaching hospital within the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System. For over fifteen years, Mercy has had a Ministry of Healing program, centered around liturgical experiences, prayer services, days of celebration, dedications and educational events. When this program was launched in the late 1970's, it was intended to be one way in which we could clearly identify ourselves as a religious, value based center for healing.

Hospitals are very intimidating places. Confusing corridors, hi-tech machinery, dependency relationships, and fear of knowing the seriousness of one's illness can rob an individual of inner peace and human dignity. In such surroundings, hospital staff become the conduit through which the negative effect of such an environment can be converted to a positive healing experience for our patients.

Hospitals are focused on disease and curing. Catholic hospitals need also to be dedicated to healing and wholeness in the care of patients and in the support of employees.

Hospitals are focused on disease and curing. Catholic hospitals need also to be dedicated to healing and wholeness in the care of patients and in the support of employees. This added vocation of religious-based healthcare is simply accepting the responsibility to heal as Jesus healed. The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is a story of healing, hope and reconciliation. The stories of Jesus opening the eyes of the blind, casting out devils, making the lame walk and raising the dead are not only moments of physical cure, but moments of healing the human spirit to be free for ministry to others. Those who saw Christ perform miracles and open the hearts of those he met during his life's journey were also deeply touched by his message and went out to their friends like the Samaritan woman, proclaiming the good news and choosing to follow Christ.

If Catholic healthcare institutions are to be reflective of Jesus' ministry to his people, then what takes place in that institution becomes paramount in creating a culture that will support a wholistic approach to curing and healing.

The story of Catholic healthcare is not unlike the life of Christ in its beginnings. It emerged on the streets of the cities, in the neighborhoods, in the homes of the needy, and in the commitment of religious congregations to serve the sick and poor wherever they found them. From those simple, uncomplicated roots, we have grown large, often complex corporate conglomerates. These mega-systems have strong business agendas that include issues like market

penetration, formation of integrated delivery networks, financial stability, access to capital dollars and the improvement of the health status of the populations they serve. In this challenging scenario, Catholic sponsors of healthcare institutions and systems have embraced the intricacies of a myriad of corporate structures in the hope that those frameworks will be life giving branches that support and promote this era's ministry to the communities we serve in sickness and in health.

While the Catholic and non-religious-based healthcare organizations may look quite similar structurally and strategically at the macro level, at the micro level they are quite different. Central to the Catholic organization is the enabling of a culture where curing and caring are partners; scripture and celebration are integral parts of the healing ministry. The imitation of Christ as healer, as giver of life, as faithful companion is the cornerstone of our institutional existence. As a Catholic healthcare provider, we are challenged to dig ever deeper into the "why?" and the "how?" of what we are about as proclaimers of the healing mission of Christ. It is as though we are serving two masters in healthcare, giving to Caesar what is his in our business life and to God what is God's in our spiritual life. Working in those two worlds of industry and mission we quickly realize that we can become so embedded in what is Caesar's that we run the risk of forgetting our primary vocation of service to the sick.

Hospitals are focused on disease and curing. Catholic hospitals need also to be dedicated to healing and wholeness in the care of patients and in the support of employees.

Building a community and a culture for healing is one way that Pittsburgh Mercy Health System tries to remember its roots and use its gifts. I have heard it said that culture is in the details. Hospitals are focused on disease and curing. Catholic hospitals need also to be dedicated to healing and wholeness in the care of patients and in the support of employees. Believing that we want to be healers in the name of Jesus, preserving our Christ-centered culture, we support a model of liturgy which reflects the wholeness of the human experience as well as the combined history and tradition of the followers of Jesus. Liturgy in this culture is an encounter with the cycle of human life and the many facets of our humanity as well as the cycle of salvation. In the words of Paul Bernier, "What is celebrated at the altar is meant to be paralleled in actual life. What we live out daily is what is brought to the altar to be transformed by God."[1]

A hospital in its own way is, itself, the altar of the Lord. It is the place where every part of the cycle of life is poured out before us. It is the place where we come to know the sacredness of life, the pains of illness and the power of prayer. It is the way of the cross where the sick and the well walk together on an otherwise lonely road to Calvary. It is the road to Emmaus where the sick are healed by those who bring them Christ through their daily ministry as caregivers. At this altar of sacrifice, all who come in need seek to be transformed, cured, healed, sheltered, made whole.

There is perhaps no other place than in a healthcare institution where the rhythm of life is more palpable. Patients, families and caregivers interact with one another and with their God in the struggle for health and healing. Life, death and everything in between sway like a branch of a tree dancing with the wind. This is life and liturgy celebrated every day in the units of our hospitals.

There is a striking relationship between the life-giving ritual at a patient's bedside and the life-giving ritual we know as eucharistic liturgy. When the people gather for the bedside ritual, the physician assumes her role as the principal celebrant, coordinating the healing ritual that involves the use of the gifts of the many people who will journey with that patient during her hospital stay. The patient, family and staff are the congregational celebrants interacting with each other, sharing their stories and skills and giving support to the healing process. The diagnoses and treatment plans inscribed on the patient's chart are the words that will lead to an understanding of her illness and a new way of life. The medications and therapies are the food that give strength in the process of curing and healing. The discharge orders are a missioning to go forth from the hospital, knowing more about one's health and better equipped to choose life.

If this is the human liturgical drama that unfolds in our institution every minute of every day, then what happens in the eucharistic liturgies in the chapel can be no less meaningful, no less riveting, no less palpable, no less interactive than the liturgy that is taking place in the life of our patients.

Our investment in liturgy is an important part of the religious "portfolio" in our organization. By making liturgy a priority in our corporate experience, we contribute to the details of a culture that encourages a vision of health and healing as wholeness of body and spirit and not simply the curing of physical diseases. Through our liturgy, well planned and well celebrated, we help one another to experience the presence of Christ in each of us. We give and receive nourishment as we journey with those in our midst who are suffer-

ing. Liturgy is about choosing and giving life! Mercy's commitment to the whole person compels us to celebrate our institutional prayer life in new and vital ways that guide the journey of the pilgrim Church of Christ.

As we emphasize a wholistic approach to the diagnosis and treatment of our patient's physical illnesses, we do the same in the development of the spiritual life of all who are a part of Mercy.

"It is critically important for the church to re-emphasize a more total approach to the human person by opening up and developing the non-rational elements of liturgical celebrations: the concerns for feelings of conversion, support, joy, repentance, trust, love, memory, movement, gesture, wonder."[2]

For Mercy Hospital, this means nurturing a healing environment through good liturgies that incorporate into the celebrations the many art forms that would open the heart, not only the mind, of the gathered assembly. Music, mime, dance, drama, poetry, sculpture, and paintings all contribute to creating the environment for liturgy that enables the community to come together as a people to be nourished for the challenge of living the Christ life in whatever circumstances they are personally experiencing.

The Holy Family Chapel at Mercy Hospital is the place where a very diverse community gathers for eucharist on weekends. Patients are present in person and through closed circuit television. Hospital staff, families of patients, neighbors, persons seeking vibrant liturgies, visitors, former patients all come together to find a deeper insight into their lives as Christians. Some persons are with us for one liturgy, others return sporadically and still others come regularly. In many cases, we have one chance at forming community with persons in the assembly, one chance to touch their lives in a meaningful way.

The liturgy at Mercy Hospital doesn't just happen. Preparation for a liturgy begins weeks in advance when the liturgy committee is convened by the Director of the Ministry of Healing Program who is a liturgist and musician. The committee, inclusive of the priest celebrants and volunteers, meets to share the readings and work together to shape a celebration that is unified, dignified, and worthy of the God we praise and the people who gather for Mass. Integral to that shape is the scripture, the music, the ministers, and the art forms that may be included as part of the celebration. With the liturgical windows opened by Pope John XXIII, we avail ourselves of all of the opportunities we now have to make the liturgy a life giving experience. Our liturgy is the "work of the people" who prepare it, the work of those who have specific ministries within it, and the work of those who participate as the people-celebrants when the assembly gathers.

The late Father Eugene Walsh, a strong influence in the church's liturgical renewal, often said to us, when he participated as teacher and friend in our educational workshops, that liturgy done poorly was devastating to the people of God. He instilled in us a passion for the artistic coordination of our celebrations. He also passed on to us an eleventh commandment: thou shalt not celebrate liturgy without preparation!

Liturgy, like healing, cannot occur in a passive mode. Those who came to Christ to be healed were all seeking something beyond their grasp whether it was freedom from a physical infirmity or a thirsting for spiritual strength. All experienced Christ in a new and redemptive way, shared the story of their encounter with Christ with others in the community and from then on lived their lives differently after having met the Messiah. To recreate that drama of Christ among his people, we use in our liturgies the talents in the community and the many art forms within which is the power to touch and transform the heart and spirit of the assembly so that through the celebration they are personally ignited with the fire of Christ's love and motivated once again to say "yes" to whatever God is calling them to be. For the sick and their families, the touch of the love of God experienced through prayer is particularly significant. That cannot be achieved in a vacuum or in a manner that appeals only to the intellectual life of the gathered assembly. When liturgy is a right and left brain experience, the soul that lives within our bodies will be like the babe in Elizabeth's womb leaping for joy at the presence of the one who leads and loves us through our infirmity and weakness. It is those wholistic, mind- and-spirit liturgies that renew and refresh the people of God.

We have accepted in our Ministry of Healing Program the responsibility to contribute to becoming a healing community through liturgy.

We have accepted in our Ministry of Healing Program the responsibility to contribute to becoming a healing community through liturgy. "You can tell a tree by its fruit" (Matt:7:20). Testimony from those who celebrate liturgy with us lead us to realize that the small tree we planted some years ago is producing a fruit of the vine that is good fruit.

Over the years, the liturgy program has attracted persons from within the hospital community and many others who are not directly involved with the hospital, but have been exposed to the vitality of Christ's message while participating in our liturgies. Captured by the Spirit, these persons continue to return to our celebrations and bring others to join us as well.

There are many poignant and faith filled stories among those persons who gather at liturgy. There is

the family who just couldn't find in their parish the spiritual nourishment that they felt they needed at the time. They heard of our liturgies and came one Saturday evening. They recently told me that they were struck by Christ's presence in the hospitality that was shown to them by the greeters and other members of the worshipping community the first time they joined us. This inclusion spoke to them of Christ saying you are no longer strangers, but friends. They have been with us ever since!

There is another couple who live in a more distant suburb of Pittsburgh, and they join us in Advent and Lent "to experience a meaningful journey in preparation for the feasts of Christmas and Easter." There is another couple who joins us on Easter Sunday. They come to remember their 21-year- old daughter who died at Mercy "with the love and support of many Mercy people" and to celebrate Easter Liturgy with the people who gave them hope and consolation during their child's long and painful illness.

The chapel and hospital are full of stories of people searching for an experience of healing, prayer and community.

There is the employee and his family who one year gave me a beautiful glass pineapple as a gift to say "thank you" for the faith we all shared in liturgy and the "prayers offered in support" when their young son was diagnosed with a cancer that would rob him of life within six months of that diagnosis.

There is a young woman, a double amputee who is a musician and not a Catholic, who came to Mass during the many times she was a patient. For her, the music, the musicians and the singing lifted her depressed spirit so that she was able to "praise the Lord and be grateful for life itself once again." From time to time she would leave her hospital room and come to chapel to play the piano, sing and praise the Lord for her gifts.

There is the family with four young children who first began celebrating liturgy with us when they had only two small children. From being regular participants they have become active volunteers in our ministry as proclaimer and cantor. This busy wife and mother also created a unique altar cloth for our Easter table. The two younger children help, too, by collecting the programs and helping the others in the general "housekeeping" chores that are needed after Mass. The chapel and hospital are full of stories of people searching for an experience of healing, prayer and community.

Giving a priority to the development of good liturgy does require staff and other resources. We, like all institutions, work on limited budgets so this program thrives with very few paid personnel and many volunteers. All of the art and environment preparation are done with volunteers, as are most of the ministries within the liturgy. Our maintenance department constructs any special equipment, such as the bubbling well that we used for the dramatization of the story of the Samaritan woman. That particular piece of art prompted one of the maintenance staff to tell me how happy the staff was to do that project as it made them feel a part of the Ministry of Healing and allowed them to use their creative talents in their work.

My own involvement in this program is as a member of the liturgy committee, as a cantor and as the person who "officially" welcomes the gathered community at the weekend liturgies. To be an active participant in these ways is a privilege that gives me joy and refreshes my spirit. As leader of a mini healthcare system, one becomes quickly and intensely involved in the hard business realities of working in an "industry" that is under siege. It is important as a leader in a religious-based organization not to lose sight of healthcare as a ministry and to give witness in leadership to the significance of creating an environment for healing and caring, not just curing. The life of Christ challenges, inspires and energizes me to leadership. Participation in the liturgical life of the organization allows me to personally witness to the spiritual dimension of leadership. Like John the Baptist, we in the ministry of leadership, are called to make ready a path for the Lord. Providing for meaningful liturgies is as important a path as offering the best staff and services to our patients. In Catholic healthcare, the path to be made ready is one that reunites body and spirit and leads to wholistic responses to needs and a deeper knowledge of how God works in our lives, especially when we are vulnerable.

My ministry is enriched as well by the two confused disciples on their way to Emmaus. They represent for me the struggles that we all have in living with doubt and the sense of loss and powerlessness when facing illness or any other personal challenge (Luke 24:13-35). When Christ walks along with them and they unburden themselves by telling the story that has left their hearts heavy, Jesus listens patiently. As they share a meal, they suddenly have an insight into the person who has joined them and their burden is lifted, their spirits are joyful. They see a promise fulfilled and their anxiety turns to hope, love and peace. We are often like those disciples. In our personal life, and especially in our institutional life, we meet with disappointment and frustration. We never exactly know how Christ is working in our story. It is often a surprise! I want to be open to that surprise encounter and so I journey with the disciples in Holy Family

Chapel as well as the disciples in our board rooms and in our management councils.

When our liturgy concludes and the assembly leaves Holy Family Chapel and they walk to the lobby on their way home, they encounter another significant detail of our hospital culture in the magnificent art work entitled, "Christ The Healer." In this majestic work that covers an entire wall, we open the scriptures to reveal Jesus as the one whom we choose to imitate in our daily ministry to those in need, physically or spiritually. Designed with strong corten steel as the frame for the multiple individual scenics, white marble-like figures parade before us representing the people of the gospel whose lives were made whole by the healing touch of Christ. The man born blind now sees. The deaf man hears. Lazarus comes out from the tomb. The paralytic walks. The newlyweds have wine for their guests. Jesus washes the feet of Peter and gathers one last time with his followers as they share a meal. Mary greets Jesus as he fulfills the promise of resurrection. Each scene a gift of life and hope—a moment of healing.

Those scenes took on a special meaning for me one day several years ago when a group of children in special education came to the hospital on a tour. The teacher was telling them about the stories that were depicted on the wall and how Jesus loved those persons whom he healed. One child was blind and so she took him to one of the scenics so he could "see" with his hands. He put his little hands on the figures, feeling every detail as the story of that particular scene was shared by the teacher. His face was alive with a delight that probably none of us with eyes really experienced. I remember wishing I could perform a miracle for that youngster and praying that in some way he felt the healing touch of the Jesus who was at his fingertips.

Culture is in the details. For the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, the details that form our culture are found in the life of Christ, the healer. Committing ourselves to the practice of good liturgies is one detail that we know brings life to the community of Mercy.

Footnotes

1. Paul Bernier, SSS, Eucharist, *Celebrating Its Rhythms In Our Lives*, (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1993): 9.
2. *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, (U.S.C.C. 1978), No. 35.

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New Publications

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, *Paul the Accused: His Portrait in Acts of the Apostles*. Zacchaeus Series. Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1995.

Janet K. Ruffing, R.S.M. has an essay in *Rattling Those Dry Bones: Women Changing the Church*, edited by June Steffensen Hagen. San Diego: LuraMedia, 1995. $16.95. Another publication is her article, "The World Transfigured: Kataphatic Religious Experience Explored Through Qualitative Research Methodology" in *Studies in Spirituality*.

Patricia Talone, R.S.M. "Can We Hear the challenge?" *Health Progress,* March, 1995.

Dissertations Recently Completed

Mary Ann Dillon, R.S.M. *The Common Good: A Catholic Theological Contribution to the Moral Basis for the Allocation and Rationing of Health Care Resources*. Ph.D. Diss. Duquesne University, 1994.

Noel Keller, R.S.M. *Choosing What is Best: Paul, Roman Society and Philippians*. Th.D. Diss. Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1995.

Aline Paris, R.S.M. *Prepare Yourself for the Journey: The Role of the Scrutinies in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. D.Min. Diss. Catholic Theological Union at Chicago, 1994.

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