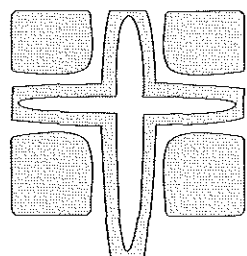


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The Direction Statement Through the Lens of Sociology

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A Female-Centered Model

Once upon a time, women and men lived together in peace and in harmony with nature. They built homes and towns in beautiful, open pastoral settings. They cultivated fields, domesticated animals, and traded far and wide by land and water. Without traditions to rely on, they created art and artifacts for living, learning to weave, to spin, and to use wood, stone, leather, and eventually precious metals. Though they made tools, there was no reason to make weapons of war or build fortresses; they had no images of warriors vanquishing enemies; rather they painted scenes of life—deer, fish, water, flowers, and symbols of transformation—butterflies, snakes, eggs. They built civilization together integrating work, recreation, and sacred rituals. The central figure of life was the female deity, the great goddess, giving life, nourishing, blessing, healing, returning the dead to her womb to be born once again to life. And the human female body was revered.

The remarkable thing about this *once upon a time* is that it is not a fairy tale, but real life, suspected for years but confirmed within the past

two to three decades by the latest scientific methods; teams of archeologists, botanists, paleontologists, climatologists, zoologists, and anthropologists have discovered, to their own astonishment, the existence of such a female-centered culture estimated conservatively to have lasted over 5000 years, from 7000–1500 BC with some goddess figures traced back 25,000–30,000 years.

Described in a landmark book, *The Chalice and the Blade*,¹ called by Ashley Montague the most important work since Darwin's *Evolution of the Species*, Riane Eisler writes of the culture which emerged, apparently with the discovery of agriculture by our foremothers, associated in all

biblical Garden of Eden all across Old Europe to the British Isles.

Scholars studying caves of the Paleolithic period initially assumed that drawings were of warriors with primitive harpoons incorrectly positioned, spraying arrows missing their mark. A closer look with improved methods suggested figures waving branches and early, stylized drawings of dancers.

Excavations done in 1980 in Crete amazed researchers: the island culture, developed from 6000 to 2000 BC, had networks of roads, villas complete with fountains and the famous palace of Knossus which opened out onto a wide road leading down to the sea. Also assumed to have been the

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ages with fertility and the earth; a culture which extended from present-day Turkey, called Anatolia, to Siberia, spreading apparently through mountain passes and the Russian steppes down to the Tigris-Euphrates and the

male seat of power, excavators finally concluded that it had been in fact a sophisticated female-centered government that promoted trade around the Mediterranean and a fairly equitable sharing of wealth on the island. Also found: ritual

drawings of a priestess, arms extended as in blessing; a double line of men processing to pay her tribute; and it was she who touched the altar.

Scholars have described life in pre-historic Crete as "perfectly expressive of the idea of human nature . . . expressing our higher impulses through joyful and mythically meaningful rituals and artistic play."

Merlin Stone who did early work in this area, discovered that the goddess was known everywhere under myriad names and images including *Sun Goddesses* in Ca-

the Decrees; the Giver of Law, of Justice, and of Mercy. And there was the *Cosmic Birth Mother; Tiamat*.⁴

Thus a female-centered paradigm of human relationships was a reality in a variety of highly developed cultures, not a myth, not without limitations, not innocent—archeologists found a small jeweled dagger in Anatolia and critics speak darkly of fertility cults—an abomination before the Lord. But this model of relationships promoted order, partnership, and interdependence and produced not only laws in harmony with

til a "lesser race" brought in their god of war.⁵

The classic myth of the conception and birth of the goddess Athene relates the struggle of a patriarchal worldview to conquer the feminine. In this tale, the goddess of wisdom, Metis, conceives Athene but her father, the sky-god Zeus, hearing a prophecy that the child will become more powerful than he, swallows his wife and the child within her womb. Later he develops a headache so terrible that he begs to have his head split open. Out springs Athene, fully grown, the new deity of wisdom, civilization, the arts, peace, and justice; and though she had come forth fully armed and shaking a javelin, the goddess was known to dislike senseless violence.

A recasting of this myth in a fifth century BC Greek drama signaled the end of the female-centered model. Concluding the trilogy with the trial of Orestes who had killed his own mother, the god Apollo appears and proclaims to the audience:

The mother is not a parent, only the nurse of the seed which the true parent, the father, commits to her as to a stranger, to keep it with God's help safe from harm. There can be a father without a mother. We have a witness here, a goddess whom no goddess could have brought to birth.

Athena then appears, expressing admiration for the male source of her being. Orestes is

A female-centered paradigm of human relationships was a reality in a variety of highly developed cultures, not a myth.

naan, Arabia, and Australia. Among the Eskimos, Japanese, the Khasis of India subordinate brothers symbolized the moon. In the Near and Middle East she was *Queen of Heaven*; in Egypt her brother-husband Geb symbolized earth.² China, D. J. Conway tells us, had a Holy Virgin whose first child, Shin-Mu, was a savior.³

In ancient tablets of Sumeria, about 2300 BC, there was a goddess who on New Year's Day judged all humankind. She knew *the orphan, the widow, sought justice for the poor and shelter for the weak.* There were other titles: *The Learned of the Holy Chambers; She who teaches*

creation and the deity but tremendous human progress.

What art historians have described as "the most complete acceptance of the grace of life the world has ever known" we now know was attacked with the power of the blade about 1500 years before Christ; a violent conquest beginning first at the edges of society but eventually conquering the peoples and their lands. Extant writings immortalized defending Amazons, and tells how shrines of the Goddess were destroyed, her names erased or masculinized. The Greek poet, Hesiod, wrote of a "golden race" who lived "with happy hearts," un-

found not guilty. And the Eumenides in the distance chant:

O black mother Night, are you watching this?
For the powers once ours,
sealed long, long ago
Have by the junior gods been
all snatched away.⁶

Obvious traces of the former time had disappeared by the year 200 AD except in subcultures, including American Indian tribes. Women of India preserve the verse:

In the forest, dancers
danced around the fire un-
interrupted.

Fire glowed on the faces of
Anath, Inanna, Isis, Istar,
Aditi.

That was a long time ago be-
fore warriors on chariots
conquered the earth; before
the smiling goddesses were
buried in the womb of the
mother earth.⁷

As we now realize, the female-centered understanding and structuring of reality was so pervasive and appealing, as the destruction of shrines in Exodus 34 notes, that declaring a mother not a mother, seeing her very being as derived from male: *fe-male*, in English, was not sufficient.

In our own faith tradition, woman is placed in the Garden of Paradise. Clearly the leader in the scene, she rejects a command of God imaged as male; she listens instead to her own cultural symbol of life, and as if this were her right, she saw that:

the tree of knowledge was good for food and to be desired to make one wise and that it was a delight to the eyes. And so she took the fruit, and shared it with her husband. (Gen 3:6)

Thus in a very different world order this woman, with all her daughters, became the temptress, "the Devil's doorway." It became her fault "that the Son of God had to die" says Tertullian. For others she became "the gate of hell." In fact, to this day, proverbs identifying woman as fundamentally diabolical, as "man's Satan," may be found in Arabic, Danish, German, Greek, Hindu, Malayan, Persian, Polish, and Russian languages.⁸

How did such a model of violence, a rationalized conquest of the male sex over the female which characterizes human society to this day begin? Again anthropologists offer clues from pre-history. Like the goddess story, this one too traces our own.

*Long, long ago after humans appeared
in the garden of the earth, the male of
our species began to bring food to the
female.*

The Patriarchal Model

Long, long ago after humans appeared in the garden of the earth, the male of our species began to bring food to the female. Margaret Mead, a pioneer in the study of primitive societies and the *nature/nurture* debate, said that although we know male birds feed their young, adult human males bringing food to the adult female was not instinctual or innate, but rather a social invention. She writes:

Among our structurally closest analogues—the primates—the male does not feed the female. Heavy with young, making her way laboriously along, she fends for herself. He may fight to protect her or to possess her; but he does not nurture her.⁹

Some suggest that in fierce *weather* conditions the male's help was enlisted for survival; some say that *qualities* gradually became set patterns—she gentle; he aggressive. Some accept the *eternal verities* theory as fact; the belief that no matter how resourceful and self-reliant females of other species were, in the case of humans the female was defective on arrival; "ontologically subordinate to man," as Karl Barth explained. In this view, the female's natural and

therefore only proper task is in nesting-related activities.

Mead herself suggested that the nourishing of the female began as an incentive or reward for being less fickle. Certainly non-primates provide extensive evidence for the universality of female promiscuity. Female primates seem to enjoy sex too, such as the tamarin monkey of South America who cultivates several mates, eventually bears and dutifully nurses twins, and has

the males carry them around the rest of the day. In fact related observations found that males caring for the young enhanced that species' chances of survival.¹⁰

With or without food or mutual affection, but with a year-round interest in sex, the stronger human male had the

Susan Brownmiller says that bride capture existed in England until the fifteenth century, and still today influences the social mores of parts of Africa and rural Sicily. Certainly, even if well-loved, the female was property.¹²

Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived in the land of Sodom and

Again we read:

Suppose a man marries a woman, and after going in to her slanders her saying: I did not find evidence of her virginity. The parents of the girl will display the marriage bed-cloth, spreading it out before the elders of the town. If she is guilty she shall be brought to the entrance of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death

(Deut 22:13-21).

Once the connection between intercourse and paternity was recognized, a basic arrangement took shape whereby the male nourished, sheltered, and protected the female and in return controlled her body.

option of what anthropologists call *forcible seizure*. Cave-man cartoons, more romantic movies of outlaws swooping in for the damsel of choice, myths such as the founding of Rome, countless references to women as booty of war—history and literature testify that in an emerging model of patriarchy this was a totally acceptable—to men—way of acquiring women.

Once the connection between intercourse and paternity was recognized, a basic arrangement took shape whereby the male nourished, sheltered, and protected the female and in return controlled her body, her foraging area, their off-spring and labor. In the *Origin of the Family*, Friederick Engels saw the earliest marriage contract as the prototype for slavery.¹¹

chanced upon travelers and persuaded them to accept his hospitality. And when they were in the house "all the townsmen of Sodom, to the last man, closed in on the house. They called to Lot and said:

Where are the men who came to your house tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have intimacies with them. Lot pleaded with them not to do this wicked thing, and he said: I have two daughters who have never had intercourse with men. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please.¹³

In Deuteronomy, we read that if a virgin is working in the field and a man seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught, the man shall pay her father, and she shall become his wife (Deut 22:28-29).

Thus is the social construction of patriarchy: the father promising to protect and nourish the family; willing or reluctant wife vowing to love, honor, and obey. It depends upon a hierarchical ordering of reality, supported, when possible, with philosophical reasoning, in which the model for relationships is:

adult male to women & children
independent to dependent

a model for sovereign to subjects
superiors to inferiors

This is a model of inequality to please those with power—gentle or violent at will, disposing at will, at peace or war at will, viewed as God's will, designed to control, through taboos, customs, traditions, legal codes, rituals, rewards, and punishments—all occurring under a sacred canopy of meanings.

Separation of the social construction of reality into clear private and public spheres also served the purpose of patriarchy. Thomas Aquinas taught that it was necessary for woman to be made:

as a *helper* to man, as Scripture says, not, indeed, as a helpmate in other works, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works; but as a helper in the work of generation.

Pope Gregory the Great concluded that woman represents the weak animal body which is properly subjected to the strong rational mind of the male.¹⁴

The Koran: (4:34) reasons:

Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that Allah has preferred one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property.¹⁵

At the beginning of what could have become a new model of equality for the sexes, when our Declaration of Independence was drafted in 1776, like other women receiving no formal education, Abigail Adams nevertheless wrote eloquently to her husband John. She urged him to say in the new document that husbands should be not masters but friends to their wives and warned that if women have no voice in laws that affect them they are "determined to foment a Rebellion" (sic). John, a Harvard graduate, answers in a tone we all may recognize, amused because she "is so saucy;" laughing at her proposed "Code of Laws." Men know better than to give up their "masculine system" he tells her. "It would subject them to the "tyranny of the petticoat" against which he'd trust all the forces of George

Washington would fight." In any case men know these are only names; men know they are really the "subjects."¹⁶

We have studied the history of man through the eyes of men—the rise of civilizations and great religions of the world. We have memorized a chronicle of their achievements and the story of their reigns—pontiffs as well as kings. Like bystanders, we learned of conquests of land, of indigenous peoples, of wars, empires, and nations. We saw that, in public, women, like children, were expected to be seen but not heard, consoled that they were emotionally essential, that "Behind every great man there is a woman."

Pope Gregory the Great concluded that woman represents the weak animal body which is properly subjected to the strong rational mind of the male.

We have known, as women always have known, that the paradigm of the patriarchal order, taught to both girls and boys from birth as real and true, pink or blue, coloring, at times determining, every aspect of their lives, has required endless distortions and ongoing pretense to maintain. For women, it has almost invariably required living in two realities: the "man's world" and that of their own experience. We see it in:

- a shrewd *Japanese* entrepreneur smarter in fi-

nance than her husband but publicly paying him homage;

- women of a *Jewish Shtetl* mastering languages, commerce, family and diplomacy at every level because their men needed freedom to study and pray; women whose own prayers were irrelevant to the community;
- strong women in *Zaire* virtually equal under a barter system of exchange until colonialists abolished the practice and paid money directly to the head of the house and she relearned "her place;"
- women of poor countries transported to factories to earn their family's living,

their husbands unemployed, then beaten at home for not having yet done "women's work;"

- women in the United States who are as *skilled* in the same work as men but are paid less for no reason other than their sex;
- women with keen *intellects* feigning ignorance in male subjects; convincing men that their ideas were really the man's own, or finding the man simply assuming as much.¹⁷

Despite the Good News of Christianity, despite the nineteenth-century Enlightenment, despite real gains by heroic women with the support of fair-minded men, despite work opportunities for women occasioned by World War II and recent advances, patriarchy remains the overarching reality of our time. Moreover, where the contract to protect and nourish has been forsaken around the globe male domination has become a demon filled with greed and lust—hungry for yet more power.

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The Dominator Model

Perpetuating the idea that males are superior to females today means that girls in poor countries are given food lower in nutrients than their brothers; girls are not educated even in technology that could improve their country's output. It is girl infants smothered in China because of the one-child rule. It speaks to the reason why only a decade ago 90 percent of United States respondents said that they'd prefer a boy as a first child.¹⁸

A patriarchal mindset that women are property continues to condone the ancient practice of genital mutilation in African countries and the

rim of the Arabian peninsula. 110 million women, plus two million more each year: their clitoris cut off with a razor or glass shard—sewn together with catgut or thorns; walking sometimes hindered for life; pain during intercourse, increased agony and danger during childbirth and early deaths. It is a measure of the worldview internalized by some women that it would be humiliating *not* to have the procedure. Men have made certain there is no female fickleness in this culture.¹⁹

In a patriarchal system of justice, husbands who immolate over six thousand brides in dowry burnings in India each year are judged not murderers, but temporarily deviant. Because husbands or their families want more consumer goods pushed by the global market, we're told the practice is increasing. A patriarchal religious definition of reality prevails when a mother knows a girl must marry to be fully human and so drowns her four daughters because they will never have enough dowry. We ask: Who in God's name protects the female in this tolerated system? Can it feed anything but greed and loss of humanity for men?²⁰

A world-wide assumption that hierarchical control is a natural ordering of human relationships permits the entrenched caste system of India to exist. It is here that we have the most oppressed women on the face of the earth: eighty million black women, Untouchables (or Dalits) are, they tell us themselves, *bonded labor and scavenging night soil*. In this perversion of the patriarchal contract, laws sanction their bodies to be "enjoyed" by the upper caste as a right. Patriarchy is the view of a highly educated United States male returned from India who says of this situation: "Oh, people get used to their life."

Is the United States a safe haven from abuse for women and children? We know it is not always. A recent report indicates that three to four million American women are battered each year by their husbands, some repeatedly, some while pregnant; that four are murdered daily, usually trying to escape; that 80 percent of cases involve children.²¹ The World Health Organization reminds us that the practice stretches far back in history and has been practiced in many parts of the world. Human Rights Watch reported this past fall that,

Such traditional abuses as wife beating remain rampant everywhere and usually unpunished. It remains a world-wide phenomenon and exists in all regions, classes and cultures, in developed and developing countries alike.²²

We know that, for many men, rape remains an assumed right. The American Medical Association estimates that over 700,000 women are sexually assaulted each year in our country; 43 percent of college-age men admit to using coercion to have sex. You may have seen the survey of 11–14 year olds reported on by the AMA this year in which over one-half of the boys and over 40 percent of the girls said that forced sex could be expected if the boy had spent a lot of money on the girl. A man who beat and raped his victim when, on their second date, she refused his advances said simply that he was angry, that “he has a male ego that must be fed.” His interviewer added that his goal was conquest, to seize what was not offered, and like others, believed his behavior was justified.

Man has indeed remained the master, not only of family and clan but of the economic and political fate of the world. It is the right to take, no matter the cost to others. It is the rise of billionaires in the poorest countries of the world; CEOs and transnational corporations with insatiable appetites for profit, dominating small countries where governments already struggle to protect and nourish their people. It is the arrogance of nuclear testing in smaller nation’s waters. It is the heady challenge of global control.

It is the Dominator as *Predator* which allows, according to the publication *World*

Vision, as many as a million children each year—girls and boys—including 300,000 from North America, to be forced into the flesh trade.²³ A girl in Paraguay promised work; transported to Greece as a sex-slave, and later to Holland, forced to pay for an abortion, which in spite of everything she doesn’t want because she is Catholic.

An International Commission of Jurists estimates

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the sex market for youngsters under sixteen as a \$5 billion industry with madams, pimps, and a criminal organization world-wide. And they can afford to pamper their sexual taste. Reports say that the Italian Mafia prefers youngsters from Eastern Europe while motorcycle gangs in Scandinavian countries traffic in Filipino girls. The U.S. is counted as one of the largest “sex-tourist” customers, with tour centers in Miami, New York, and San Diego, advertisements in magazines like *Oriental Women* and *Soldier of Fortune*. Destinations are often Japan and southeast Asia; male patrons range from ages 30 to 60, from carpenters to lawyers. Some of the exploited have been killed or kill their

customer and are now in prison. Who speaks for the innocent in this growing obscenity? Who speaks against this abomination?²⁴

Then there is war. Fifty years ago in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, a Geneva Convention agreed that “Women shall be especially protected . . . against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.”

But according to Amnesty International:

The deliberate violation of the human rights of women is increasingly a central component of military strategy in conflicts all over the world.

The report adds:

Rape is not an accident of war, or an incidental adjunct to armed conflict. Its widespread use in times of conflict reflects the special terror it holds for women, the special power it gives the rapist over his victim, the special contempt it displays for her.²⁵

In spite of declarations, were not women forced into servicing rampaging soldiers in Bosnia simply an updated version of the 200,000 “comfort women” imprisoned for Japan’s Imperial Army during WW II?

In war's milieu in Uganda, children returning from school see a soldier following and begin to run. The boy is shot dead. The girls taken for the pleasure of troops. One, "lucky one," is found running naked and hysterical through fields by friendly persons. She has cigarette burns all over her body; her escape the only reason her story came to light at a UN tribunal.

The Vatican delegate said at the last United Nations meeting,

The fact of the use in this 20th century of sexual violence as an instrument of armed conflict has stunned the conscience of humanity.

Perhaps they were thinking of the testimony of a refugee trying to get with her young son from point A to G in some local African war. How all she had to give in payment at each point was her body, how for the guard's entertainment her son was ordered to rape his mother. And when, refusing, he was about to be killed, she told him to do it since he was all she had to live for. And many other tales.²⁶

As a *US News & World Report* concluded in 1994, "Much of the world is still waging war on women."²⁷

Model for a New Age

The spectacle of our species, the glory of creation, hating, abusing, killing its own kind would surely amaze an alien visitor. Do you believe that the violence of war and of structural oppression is natural to

humans or the result of an overarching paradigm of domination gone mad?

We know the fierce resistance, not least by religious groups, to change any aspect of the patriarchal model, including language itself, through which, as we know, reality is symbolized. Headlines announced recently that Catholic bishops considering inclusive language for the Lectionary "Can't Agree On Gender Issue." Later, Southern Baptists attacked with a passion an effort of The International Bible Society to publish a gender-neutral language edition. The president of the Baptist Seminary called the proposal, now withdrawn, part of a

feminist effort to re-engineer society and abandon God's parameters for the home and for the church.²⁸

We come here then, filled with hope and purpose, some of the freest women in the world, knowing that although all the women in our country make up less than 5 percent of women in the world, our influence is greater than our numbers. As a sister from Kenya put it:

Though our women are still walking ten miles for water, we know that whatever progress you make will one day be ours too.

As a Chinese student said of American women: "You are for others, marching, carrying signs, speaking out. We are more for ourselves." Then she added: I think it is better to be for others.

And so we come carrying the *hope* of so many women in the world.

We come in the name of *all great women* who by their faith, strength and courage have prepared the way for us in society and church.

We come in the name of *Catherine McAuley*, learned in the mind of Christ and in the Quaker view of Christian equality of the sexes.

We come on the eve of a *Jubilee Year* dedicated by the Christian Churches to unity, and through conversion, to a restoration of *right relationships*.

We come confident of the *signs of the times* hearing the earth and sky saying they will take no more destruction; joining women in ever larger numbers, raising their voices saying: *We will take no more. It is enough!*"

We join our efforts with *men*, conscientious objectors throughout the ages to war, children also of the goddess heritage. We join together insisting: *Human rights are women's right! Equality, Development and Peace.*

We come in the *Spirit of God* who is raising up leaders, enlivening imaginations, quickening spirits, opening minds *to see the world through women's eyes*, opening eyes to glimpse the dawn of a new age. The Spirit of God, *Ruah*, in our very bones, promising: *I will make all things new!*

Indeed new things abound:

- A *Woman Manager* of a mission to Mars.

- *The White House* with an office to implement the United Nation's Women's Platform with its Twelve Critical Areas for Action.
- *The World Wide Web*—Feminist Majority On-line—reaching women worldwide about issues affecting them, astonishing numbers of resources, academic programs, publications; films, videos, TV portrayals of strong women; women *writers* telling of great and "uppity" women, anthologies impossible a generation ago telling of our mothers in the U.S. and through the ages.
- Women challenging the Citadel and City Hall, home and office regarding *abuse* in all its forms.
- *Young women*, saying things like Joan of Arc is a hero because of what she did for her people; another's aspiration to help poor women get low interest loans to start businesses. We read about Hillary and Queen Sophia of Spain with corporate men types addressing a conference to push such loans.²⁹

Who could have imagined until now *The Economist* reflecting on "unfortunate social side-effects" of aggressive male behavior, about "testosterone and its antidotes," venturing that "knowledge-based societies, with their stress on brain, not brawn, may be safer in women's hands."³⁰

Who could have predicted that women-owned businesses would increase from 5 percent to 35 percent in a little over two decades, businesses which it has been found "rely less on authority and traditional power relationships," where "success is less a matter of conquest than of collaboration," and where "priorities may be determined as much by family and community imperatives" as financial gain. Male-run business, too, is adopting a "new, radical approach to management" centered around previously devalued qualities of teamwork, respect, and relationship building. The question is posed by one writer: Do women hold some mysterious secret for doing business in the twenty-first century?³¹

We answer: *Yes, they do!* It is a secret gladly shared, in fact proclaimed from the global stage: *There can and must be a new model for a new age—for the business of commerce and for the business of our lives: a reclaimed, re-imaged model of partnership* that taps the genius of both sexes, that puts women with men at the table where reality is named and justice defined, where they address questions as to:

- why two-thirds of *illiterate* adults worldwide are women,
- why women *own less* than one one-hundredth of the world's land,
- why their work, as L. Lindsey has noted, is called *non-work*,³²

- why in the poorest countries, in fields heavy with their young, they grow, harvest, process and prepare virtually all the food consumed by their families while their labor is called *subsistence only* and essentially unpaid.

It is a model of *partnership* that welcomes women to the sacred table and the pulpit, as well as to the pew, so that both sexes are nourished. It is a model in which at last it is clearly acknowledged that the only infallible truth about woman's anatomy is that, like man's, it is made in God's image.

Our Future

In the year 2500, someone relating our story might begin: "Once upon a time when patriarchy had exhausted itself in war, the goddess awoke from the womb of mother earth, and her daughters too awakened to a new morning.

And women decided what their part would be in constructing a new world order.

A few women agreed with the swaggering male who said that in his state women just wanted *to be kept*, an option wealthy women always had.³³

Some still wanted to be just *cheerleaders* for men, not minding violence until it touched their own lives.

Some still bought *Barbie* dolls for their little girls, not realizing it had been modeled on a lascivious plaything for adult German males and mainstreamed by a woman for American consumption.³⁴

Some chose to live the *Cosmopolitan* girl image: disciplined to achieve success and beauty so that every other moment of life could be spent "pleasuring oneself." Like her male counterpart, she had no need to nourish anyone.³⁵

But other women wanted to stand together not for themselves alone, not by themselves alone, but with those men who also knew that the "modern" world had engaged only half its brain and heart, who knew that the third millennium would need all its human potential.

And so a movement began: volunteer, grass-roots groups, non-governmental organizations, grew from three hundred to three thousand around the world in ten years, formed around human rights and women, the economy, the environment, animals, nature, politics and peace. Momentum gained at UN meetings in Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, and Beijing were followed with a local protest in Bangladesh, 100,000 strong—mostly women but some men too—against clerics' opposition to female education and employment.

And they remembered a challenging, exhilarating sport, a game-type religious ritual from the Minoan period of the goddess in which a pair, a young woman and young man, entrusting their lives to each other, ran together with great speed toward a charging bull. At the split second when the bull tried to gore them,

they would leap, each grabbing the bull by a horn and somersaulting over him.³⁶

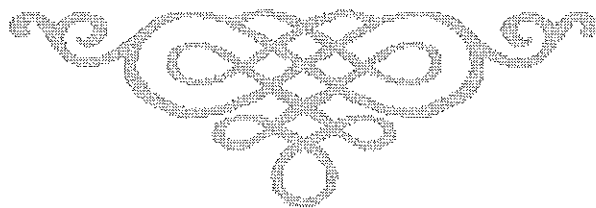
We have been invited here to a ritual under the banner of God's mercy. The challenge is great; our Statement of Direction clear. *All that remains is that we get on our mark; get ready; get set; and go!*



Notes

1. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988). See also Eisler's *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* (San Francisco/New York: HarperCollins, 1995).
2. Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*. (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1978).
3. D. J. Conway, *Maiden, Mother, Crone: The Myth and Reality of the Triple Goddess*. (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1996), pp. 33 and 40.
4. Hallie Iglehart Austen, *The Heart of the Goddess: Art, Myth and Meditations of the World's Sacred Feminine*. (Berkeley, CA: Winglow Press, 1990).
5. *Hesiod and the Theognis*, trans. by Dorothea Wender (New York: Penguin, 1973), p. 62.
6. Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*.
7. Sheila Ruth, *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies*. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1995). See discussion of Indian tribes and the centrality of the female, including woman as Creatrix, by Paul Le Jeunes, S.J., pp. 187–190. See also the booklet *Daughters of Fire*, distributed in a workshop on the changing face of dowry violence, on Sept. 6, 1995, at the U.N. Non-Governmental Organization Women's Forum in Huairou, China. The event was coordinated by women from Bangalore, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
8. Tama Starr, ed. *The "Natural Inferiority" of Women: Outrageous Pronouncements by Misguided Males*. (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991).
9. Margaret Meade, "Fatherhood, A Social Invention," in *Women's Studies: Essential Readings*, ed. by S. Jackson, K. Atkinson, D. Beddoe, T. Brewer, S. Faulkner, A. Hucklesby, R. Pearson, H. Power, J. Prince, M. Ryan and P. Young (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 79–80.
10. See Mykol C. Hamilton and Shannon Stuart-Smith, "Sociobiology Revisited," in *Issues in Feminism*, ed. by Sheila Ruth, pp. 202–207.
11. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1942).
12. Susan Brownmiller, "Rape," in *Issues in Feminism*, ed. by Sheila Ruth, pp. 184–86.
13. Gen. 19:1–11. In this case the two daughters were saved and Sodom was destroyed. A man's freedom to give a woman over to sexual abuse is documented also in the story of the concubine in Judges 19:22–30.
14. Carole E. Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 55.
15. The Koran 4:34.
16. See "The Adams Letters, Abigail and John Adams," in *Issues in Feminism*, pp. 476–477.

17. See the Japanese interview related by Akemi Kikumura in *Women's Studies*, op. cit., pp. 96-99, and the Jewish shtetl interview by Barbara Myerhoff, pp. 99-102.
18. Rita Freedman, "Myth America Grows Up," in *Issues in Feminism*, pp. 377-405.
19. "Human Rights are Women's Right," an Amnesty International Briefing, (March, 1995). The publication does not have numbered pages. It includes the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, statements on women and war, and genital mutilation. See also World Health, "Women and Health," a special issue of selected articles for the United Nations NGO Forum in 1995, with female circumcision treated on pp. 16-17. See A.M. Rosenthal, "Fighting Female Mutilation," *New York Times* (April 12, 1996) p. A15.
20. *Daughters of Five*, publication of the United Nations NGO Forum on Women, 1995, breakout session on dowry burnings.
21. See Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, eds. *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*. (New York: Continuum, 1995).
22. Barbara Ehrenreich, "For Women, China Is All Too Typical," *Time* (September 18, 1995), p. 130, on the abuses of women around the world.
23. Sheryl Watkins, "Overcoming the Obstacles: Third-World Women" in *World Vision*. Articles in this publication concern sexual exploitation, child-brides, poverty, literacy, and child labor.
24. "Asian Sex Tours Are an American Business, Too," *Business Week* (June 17, 1996), p. 46.
25. Amnesty International (April, 1997) reminds us that although 154 countries have signed the "U.N. Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1979, the United States has not yet signed this treaty.
26. Eva Friedlander, ed. *Look at the World Through Women's Eyes: Plenary Speeches from the NGO Forum on Women, Beijing, 1995*. See also "They Are So Sweet, Sir," a performance presented by Women of Bethany at the NGO Forum on Women in September, 1995, based on the book by Chris DeStoop, on international sex trafficking.
27. "The War Against Women," *U.S. News and World Report* (March 28, 1994), p. 42.
28. "Society Drops Its Plans for Gender-Neutral Bible Edition," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (May 29, 1997), p. 15A.
29. "Remarks by First Lady Hillary Clinton to the UNIFEM Panel on Economic Empowerment," The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing International Convention Center, September 6, 1995.
30. "The Trouble with Men," *The Economist* (September 28, 1996), p. 19.
31. Joline Godfrey, "Been There, Doing That," *INC.* (March, 1996), pp. 21-22.
32. Linda L. Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, 3rd ed., (Columbus, OH: Prentice Hall, 1997). See "Full-Time Homemaker as Unpaid Laborer," pp. 98-99, and "Global Perspectives on Gender," p. 127.
33. See *U.S. Follow-Up to the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, The President's Interagency Council on Women* (May, 1996). This report describes efforts to implement the U.N. Platform for Action following the Beijing Conference.
34. M. G. Lord. *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll* (New York: Avon, 1995).
35. See *Cosmopolitan* (February, 1997). It is still the number one magazine sold on college campuses and number six on U.S. newsstands for the past sixteen years. Helen Gurley Brown, though retired in 1997 as executive editor, has now extended her publication efforts to twenty-nine international editions.
36. Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, p. 35.



The Direction Statement Through the Lens Of Spirituality

Listening to the Original Sound

Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M.

We gather this weekend as educators. Some of us give that educational activity a primary and institutional commitment in our lives. Others recognize educational endeavors in less formal, non-institutional activities. We are all, as Maureen Lowry suggests on the cover of the registration brochure, teachers and learners/learners and teachers in a life-long process which is at the heart of our endeavors in Mercy. Whatever our circumstances, we understand the importance of recognizing a dynamic of knowing and unknowing in human experience.

service have specific constellations of experience and persons whose meaning and presence enrich our life together even as we, in our experiences and persons, create it. The journey and the story, then, in-spirit us, inspire us, even as we in-spirit, inspire, both journey and story.

Numerous studies demonstrate this relationship between a person's / a people's self-understanding, educational background, historical moment, and intellectual convictions and their experience of the ultimate (God) in their lives, that is, their spirituality.

The heart, the source, of any lasting contributions we might make as "Mercy persons" rests in our capacity to recognize this centering of energy and to be present to our time and circumstance with a passion similar to that which earlier generations in the tradition brought to theirs. We must teach and learn/learn and teach that the timeless legacy which is ours rests not in the life or the works or the achievements of Catherine McAuley, not in an organization called the Sisters of Mercy, not in institutions titled Mercy Hospital or Mercy High School, or Catherine McAuley Shelter, not in specific individuals named Frances or Moira or Elena. The timeless legacy which is important in our faith tradition and our sisterhood is a living memory of spiritual gifts (hospitality, compassion, union and charity, works of mercy, providential trust) transmitted in time and space through the instrumentality of persons, institutions, and communities.

These gifts are not, of course, uniquely ours; but they are unique in us. These gifts quite literally flow in the ancient energy of creation and express themselves newly in

We are all teachers and learners/learners and teachers in a life-long process which is at the heart of our endeavors in Mercy.

As Mercy sisters, associates, coministers, and friends, we engage together the possible call of the Institute Direction Statement in our lives. That adjective "Mercy" suggests a common journey and a common story. The journey and the story place us in a particular faith tradition and a particular community-in-service. Both the faith tradition and the community-in-

We do well then, in the midst of our struggle with cultural and global issues reflecting the absence of God's kingdom, to pause and reflect on the possibility that naming ourselves "Mercy" constitutes a centering of energy by which we might understand ourselves and the finite and infinite relationships which constitute this self/selves.

every age and culture and circumstance. They center with particular nuance and focus in a church called Catholic, in a story called Sisters of Mercy. This legacy of faith and Mercy, then, is always about incarnation rather than replication and/or preservation. A tale adapted from a little book called *The Magic Monastery* by Theophane the Monk explains this profound reality:

I asked an old nun, "How long have you been here?"
 "Forever," she answered.
 I smiled. "Fifty years, Sister?"
 "Forever."
 "Did you know Catherine McAuley?"
 "We are novices together."
 "Did you know Jesus?"
 "He and I converse every day."
 I threw away my silly smile, fell to my knees, and clutched her hand. "Sister," I whispered, "Did you hear the original sound?"
 "I am listening to the original sound."

I would like to suggest that we have in the historical development of active religious life an energy and passion capable of sustaining a community-in-service and individuals-in-service into the third millennium, but we need to listen to the original sound even as we work out our own rendition. This is the substance of all spirituality. Contemporary discussions and explorations of this phenomenon of spirituality could benefit from such attentiveness on our part and a willingness to share what we hear in such careful listening.

I would like to suggest in the limited time we have together that the heart of such listening lies in the last line of our Institute Direction Statement—continual conversion—and that elements important in our teaching and learning/learning and teaching rest in phrases not entirely emphasized in this conference agenda: Gospel animation, Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor, action in harmony and interdependence with all creation. Let us, then, spend a few minutes studying our Direction Statement through the lens of a spirituality in-spirited by our history as an apostolic congregation.

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 of active religious life an energy and
 passion capable of sustaining a
 community-in-service.*

Spirituality—What It Is, How It Works

Much is being written these days concerning the phenomenon of spirituality. We have a variety of possible definitions. Anne Carr in *Transforming Grace* asserts that spirituality "includes life-styles, attitudes, ideas, values, habits, and activities, images, stories, beliefs, even emotions and bodily expressions that are chosen as appropriate response to God and . . . to the life of love and union that God continually offers."¹ Diarmuid

O'Murchu in *Quantum Theology* suggests simply that spirituality is "the human search for meaning."² Catherine LaCugna in *God for Us* asserts that "the 'spiritual life' of Christians is nothing more than training the eye of the heart on the glory of God, and living in such a way that one acquires the habit of discerning [its] brilliance."³ Phyllis A. Tickle, religious editor of *Publishers Weekly*, describes rather than defines when she says that spirituality is the domain of the soul where image is [to the soul] as language is to the body; the discipline which balances the gifts of the body to life (logic and procreation)

with the gifts of the soul [to life] (wisdom and incorporation).⁴ Jean Steffes, CSA, in an unpublished paper; suggests that "spirituality refers to my belief system raised to a life-style . . . to how I express belief and value in the choices I make in ordinary living."

In addition, studies have attempted to describe the elements of an apostolic spirituality, that is, the centering of energy in a life given over to service and witness. Such a spirituality requires that we be attentive to and motivated by the presence of the sacred, particularly in our activities.

John Lozano, CMC, in *Ministerial Spirituality and Religious Life* describes the phenomenon quite succinctly: "The entire development of apostolic spirituality will consist in a constantly more aware experience of the presence and action of God in [our persons and our activity]." ⁵ Anne Clifford, CSJ, suggests that an apostolic spirituality "assumes that carrying out the mission of Jesus in our world is the primary locus for experiencing a heightened awareness and love of God." ⁶ Such an apostolic spirituality today makes use of those religious exercises from Eastern and Western, Christian and non-Christian faith traditions, which assist the centering of our life-energy in a balance of giving and receiving, healing and being healed, activity and passivity, knowing and unknowing, which frees us for participation in the profound unfold-

interactions among human persons and, indeed, all creation. Spirituality happens in the unique experience of human person, but it is contained also in groups and communities of persons. Just as each person develops beliefs and values reflected in the choices of ordinary living, so groups / communities / organizations develop beliefs and values reflected in the choices of their ordinary living. It is the search for such beliefs and values on the part of individuals and groups, the deconstruction and reconstruction of these elements of life, that seems to have created in our decade an increase of interest, conversation, and exploration around matters of the spirit. Phyllis Tickle's book, *Rediscovering the Sacred: Spirituality in America* offers some surprising statistics regarding this phenomenon in the United States:

- a Gallup study projects that the largest sale increase in non-fiction books will be in religion/spirituality in the 21st century (an 82 percent growth by 2010 over the sales in 1987)

While we understand that spirituality differs from theology as well as religion and that an interest in the one does not necessarily translate to participation in and/or commitment to the other, the increase of interest in spirituality offers a moment of opportunity and possibility for those of us whose spirituality roots itself in a particular religion and theology. As Phyllis Tickle says, in a remark similar to John XXIII's opening statement at the Second Vatican Council, "There comes a time or times periodically in all human encounters with religion when the community must begin to separate or to separate once more the substance of faith from the forms of faith." ⁷ We are, it would appear, in such a time. The opportunity of this time lies in the exploration of new horizons of human experience and knowledge. Its possibility lies in the integration of these new insights and learning into our individual lives and into the life of the community. This task rests with particular appropriateness in communities of apostolic life.

Apostolic religious life, by its very nature, takes shape and form from the social and ecclesial order of its time and

While spirituality begins in the human person, it necessarily ends in the relationships and interactions among human persons.

ing of creation which is all that is happening anywhere, anyplace, any time.

Whatever our definition or nuance, we understand in the concept of spirituality an inner domain of meaning and an outer realm of activity. While spirituality begins in the human person, it necessarily ends in the relationships and

- Between 1993 and 1994, Ingram Book Company experienced a 249 % growth in the movement of its religion/ spirituality inventory; American Publishers [Company] between February 1994 and February 1992 experienced a 59 percent increase in sales in this category.

the pressing needs which reflect the absence of God's kingdom. Careful yielding to the insights and experiences of place and time become a matter of integrity: "our world is the primary locus for experiencing a heightened awareness and love of God." Both the exploration and the integration are a fundamental call to conversion. This is the message, it seems to me, of the political and scientific and social turmoil of this closing decade of the second millennium.

Continual Conversion

When we called ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries in the Institute Chapters of 1991 and 1995, we may not have realized the timeliness, quite literally, of that call. We may still be thinking too narrowly of its meaning. Bernard Lonergan, in his significant effort to develop a theological method in keeping with new understandings of the nature of human knowing, highlights the importance of this concept of continual conversion. As we can no longer talk of spirituality as a compartment of one's life or one's behavior, so we can no longer speak of conversion as a narrow compartment of one's religious experience. If, as Anne Carr asserts, "spirituality includes lifestyles, attitudes, ideas, values, habits, and activities, images, stories, beliefs, even emotions and bodily expressions," or, as Catherine LaCugna, says "the spiritual life is . . . living in

such a way that one acquires the habit of discerning [the glory of God]" or, as Jean Steffes suggests, "spirituality is how I express belief and value in the choices I make in ordinary living," conversion must be a process affecting each and all of these elements. Indeed, as Lonergan says, "conversion may be [must be] intellectual or moral or religious . . . [and] each of the three is connected with the other two."⁸

Continual conversion would suggest a dynamic process—

tures; it begins a new sequence that can keep revealing ever greater depth and breadth and wealth. Such an about-face and new beginning is what is meant by conversion.¹⁰

This call to continual conversion says something not only about our individual journey, but also, and perhaps more importantly, about our journey together. We need be about the task of creating an environment and a common life in which conversion is nurtured and sustained, in which

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of its meaning.*

turning toward, bending with, over and over and over again. We are not simply converted. We are continually converting: turning toward, bending with, the ultimate mystery present in life. Lonergan speaks of *horizons* and *conversion* in his *Method of Theology*:

Horizon denotes the bounding circle...the limit of one's field of vision. As one moves about, it recedes in front and closes in behind so that, for different standpoints, there are different horizons . . . Beyond the horizon lie the objects that, at least for the moment, cannot be seen.⁹

It is possible that the movement into a new horizon involves an about-face; it comes out of the old by repudiating characteristic fea-

continual conversion is expected and supported, an environment in which teaching and learning is not something we do, but something we are. Such an environment encourages an attitude which frees human experience to engage difference as opportunity to "bend with" rather than threat to "be protected from." Such an attitude nurtures the learning community which Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* insists is the essential habitat of humanity into the third millennium:

we need to design [institutions] as learning organizations 'where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking

are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together.'

This call to continual conversion insures a creative centering of energy in the present and toward the future and helps us create communities of persons whose presence would attract in the manner Catherine envisioned "as so many magnets."

Calling ourselves to continual conversion is not simply about lifestyle and ministries. It is about beliefs and values, about attending to the world in which we find ourselves and learning from that world the meaning of ultimate mystery. Continual conversion is a chal-

private as to be solitary. It can happen to many, and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation and to help one another in working out the implications and fulfilling the promise of their new life.¹¹

Gospel Animation/ Passion for the Poor/ Contemplation (Apos- tolic Spirituality)

Three elements of our current Direction Statement—Gospel animation, Catherine's passion for the poor, action in harmony and interdependence with all creation—seem to offer fertile ground for personal conversions that may seek the support of our common life to

Calling ourselves to continual conversion is not simply about lifestyle and ministries. It is about beliefs and values, about attending to the world in which we find ourselves.

lenge to growth in spirit and in truth and a call to test our horizons constantly, to recognize that where we stand influences what we see, to engage conflict, and to allow an about-face over and over again. Bernard Lonergan describes both the promise and the challenge we offer one another in a Direction Statement that calls to continual conversion:

Conversion is existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate. But it is not so

sustain our self-transformation. Gospel animation and a passion for the poor seem continually to necessitate an "about-face" or, at least, a "half-turn" which shifts our horizon and, therefore, both what we see and how we see it. Action in harmony and interdependence with all creation, however, may offer the deepest point of continuing conversion and most significant recentering of our apostolic spirituality into the third millennium.

Action in harmony and interdependence with all creation seems first of all about perception / reflection / contemplation and only secondarily about action. We will act in harmony only when we live in harmony; we will act in interdependence only when we realize our life-sustaining interconnectedness with all creation. Thomas Berry provides a most succinct expression of the challenge and the content to a too-prevalent mindset which suggests that human beings are the pinnacle of creation, independently wealthy by divine decree:

Any human activity must be seen primarily as an activity of the universe and only secondarily as an activity of the individual. In this manner it is clear that the universe as such is the primary religious reality, the primary sacred community, the primary revelation of the divine, the primary subject of incarnation, the primary unit of redemption, the primary referent in any discussion of reality or of value . . . For the first time we can tell the universe story, the earth story, the human story, the religion story, the Christian story, and the church story as a single comprehensive narrative.¹²

Action in harmony and interdependence with all creation shifts the positioning of the self vis-à-vis cosmic realities. Action in harmony and interdependence stems from a consciousness formed by contemplation which embraces the unity at the center of the wondrous diversity which is life. In such a worldview, Thomas Berry's definition of

the human as "that being in whom the universe activates, reflects upon, and celebrates itself in conscious self-awareness" makes a great deal of sense.¹³ So does the effort to concentrate on the spiritual energy within the universe in order to release the power of imagination as well as the strength of rational insight into problem solving, organizational planning, life development.

Science itself these days recognizes mystery at the heart of the universe and, I suspect, supports the discovery of mystery at the heart of each element of that universe. Contemplation as a discipline of one's spirit constitutes a habit of mind/heart which begins to see all things (persons, events, feelings, ideas) as possible conveyors of ultimate meaning and seeks potential eruptions of divine reality into human consciousness. Contemplation as a discipline of spirit draws us into the ultimate mystery of unity in diversity to which Julian of Norwich refers when she exclaims: "Greatly should we rejoice that God dwells in our soul—and rejoice yet more because our soul dwells in God."¹⁴ Such a habit of mind/soul suggests that human action is incomplete without a centered spirit, without attention and awareness. Only if what we do flows from a rich inner presence to all creation can our actions be gentle enough and careful enough and powerful enough to contribute to a wholesome

future for all things living, and all things are living, you know.

Unless we lead ourselves and those with whom we walk the journey of human experi-

cumstances of daily life . . . We must fight the temptation to consider our lives too ordinary or too messy for a visitation from God."¹⁵ My concern is not that we educate for action.

Unless we insist as educators that the spirit is the center, we fail to provide the perspective from which life can be lived well.

ence from outwardness toward inwardness, our footsteps will continue to crush and destroy and marginalize and divide. Unless we insist as educators that the spirit is the center, that the mind, the emotions and the body are modalities which express that center, we fail to provide the perspective from which life can be lived well. Where the body is maimed or weak or disturbed, we begin there. Where the emotions are maimed or weak or disturbed, we begin there. Where the mind is maimed or weak or disturbed, we begin there. But we do not stop where we begin. The movement is always outward and inward, integrating the pieces along the way. We are talking about contemplation as a way of ordinary life, the central feature of spirituality into the third millennium. Patricia Cooney Hathaway in an article entitled "The Mysticism of Everyday Life" rightly cautions that "the mystical journey is to be discovered and nurtured in normal cir-

My concern is that we educate for contemplative action, for action that follows attentive listening to creation manifest in ourselves and in other selves, and awareness of the interconnectedness of all things in one creative impulse of love. We must teach/learn and learn/teach the wondrous paradox that only by entering deeply into our own spirit's center can we embrace redemptively the whole cosmic reality centered in that being.

Such contemplation will lead to a new reading of the "good news" of our faith tradition and the "Catherine's passion for the poor" of our congregational story. In the *Positio*, Angela Bolster says "Catherine's spirituality (her whole religious experience) was marked by her ability to create and maintain inner spiritual space, to be constantly aware of the mystery of God and to be able to find [God's] touch everywhere in the world of people, in the world of their occupations and of their miseries . . . Her

apostolic spirituality may be said to have effectively translated the gospel into the idiom of her time and to have conveyed this ideal to others." Catherine understood, then, that an authentic living of the gospel calls us deeply into relationship with God and into the realities of our time in a continual reincarnation of divine reality in human expression. In a very real sense, it is not Catherine's passion for the poor which need animate us, but our own; likewise, it is not Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's discovery of good news which need animate us, but our own discovery.

"Did you know Catherine McAuley?"

"We are novices together."

"Did you know Jesus?"

"He and I converse every day."

I threw away my silly smile, fell to my knees, and clutched her hand. "Sister," I whispered. "Did you hear the original sound?"

"I am listening to the original sound."

"Good news" and "passion" and "animation" connote qualities of life, of focus, of vigor, of delight. They also suggest an immediacy which we too often neglect in our

tion and revelation. That living word of Jesus' story and of Catherine's story takes root again and again in the individual and in the community over time and through time and, ultimately, beyond time. Fullness comes, as the Scripture tells us, in the fullness of time, but until that end-point, time itself—our time, for there is quite literally no other time—is the most precious locus of the full flourishing of the gospel.

The documents of Vatican Council II dramatically recalled Roman Catholicism to this belief and to its implications:

At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel . . . We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live.

—*Gaudium et Spes*, #4

Currently liberation theologians, such as Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Tissa Balasuriya; feminist theologians such as Anne E. Carr, Margaret Farley, Catherine LaCugna, and Elizabeth Johnson; geologists such as Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and Miriam

Nhat Hanh are helping us to understand the manner in which awareness of the aspirations and the dramatic features of the world in which we live renews the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and those of us within that Church.

"Animation" and "passion" raise questions of source and motivation and relationship: "we must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live." In a presentation at Mercyhurst College, I offered some thoughts regarding liberation theology's impact on our understanding of mercy and the works of mercy. We must be about the scholarship of such integration of new insights as well as the living of such integration. For example, liberation theologian Jon Sobrino articulates a most dramatic feature of today's world and sheds new meaning on our call in mercy:

We live in a suffering world . . . Confronted with such a world of suffering, one's primary and ultimate response is, as it would be before any suffering, that of compassion . . . Given this kind of massive and structural suffering . . . the response of mercy must be a response of justice that will bring liberation.¹⁶

In this decade and into the third millennium, a response of mercy (which Sobrino defines as "a principle . . . an action . . . a reaction to someone else's suffering") is incomplete without a response of justice. Further, liberation theologians push our understanding

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journey toward the kingdom. The living word remains the only word capable of redemp-

Therese McGillis; spiritual thinkers such as Parker Palmer, Maria Harris, and Thich

of the works of mercy beyond direct service of individuals to systemic realities which also deserve redemption. In speaking of "taking a crucified people down from the cross," Sobrino and other liberation theologians challenge us to understand the works of mercy in wider and wider circles of global relationship and to discover systemic understandings of these same works. Such an understanding calls us to place our daily service in the context of a universe in which entire peoples suffer from ignorance, hunger, and sickness of many kinds; in which burying the dead may refer to innumerable species and nakedness to lands and foliage as well as peoples; in which systems—ecclesial, political, economic—imprison as effectively as buildings.

As educators, such a global perspective challenges the content of what we teach, the attitudes with which we teach, and the context in which we teach. The choices we make, as we well know, are political as well as an educational ones. The legacy of the martyrs of the Central American University in San Salvador presents the ultimate risk of such a choice. Yet, as Ignacio Ellacuría, the president of that university, wrote before his death,

To study a situation [is indissolubly linked with] accepting the burden of that situation and becoming responsible for the situation . . . the Christian character of a university [an institution/a parish/a shelter] is not measured by religious practices

but rather by service to a more human configuration of society."

In a similar vein, Xabier Gorostiaga, S.J., an economist from the Central American University in Managua, Nicaragua, at a recent Global Economics and Human Rights Conference developed eight theses shared by an emerging geoculture which he described at length in a paper entitled "Geocultural Development."

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His sixth thesis listed the reform of the educational system as one of the most urgent tasks of our time:

Both the educational system and the lack of education are part of the problem of underdevelopment more than they are a constructive element for getting out of it . . . The democratization of knowledge, its insertion at the service of the necessities, values and interests in the "bottom-up globalization" are part of the new geoculture.

Gospel animation and Catherine's passion for the poor cannot be vital without the integration of such awareness and such insights into the choices of our ordinary living.

Likewise we begin, in our cosmic-conscious, quantum-

theory universe, to understand the human species itself as recipient of the works of mercy from the universe itself. Sister Constance Kozol, a Sister of Mercy from the Regional Community of Dallas, Pennsylvania, in a refreshing series of articles in their community newsletter presents new images and understandings from this perspective. She speaks of how the Earth itself expresses visitation of the sick:

A young bottle nosed dolphin appeared inside the surf line of Santa Monica Bay. Marine conservationists noted that it was in a severely weakened state . . . They saw six other adult dolphins surround the sick one in an effort to keep it from beaching itself. Pelicans and crows have been known to feed and care for blind comrades.¹⁷

She also speaks of the manner in which health professionals have become more and more aware that patients who have a view of trees, sky, and the natural world fare better than those whose view is a highway, or buildings, or parking lots. She asks us to think about a homelessness that is an alienation from the natural world and its implications:

Jungian psychologist James Hillman and cultural sociologist Theodore Roszak have begun to warn those of us in this over-mechanized and sanitized Western culture of the dangerous effects of such alienation . . . we are born of Mother Earth. We need to find our way back home to her.¹⁸

"Animated by the gospel and Catherine's passion for the poor" translates today into a choice to enter the struggle for justice from the vantage point of persons who are poor and a universe which is vulnerable. We continue in the struggle aware of the forgiveness and the reconciliation necessary for mercy and justice to meet. We understand in that mercy and justice the cry of the poor and the cry of the universe and the cry of our own suffering hearts. We cannot be content that structures have yielded, procedures have changed, processes have improved. We must seek also a reuniting of those lives torn apart by unjust structures, wounded by processes causing harm to oppressor and oppressed; isolated by procedures disrespectful of the human dignity we all bear in common. We must seek a liberation of the human spirit from attitudes of revenge, self-pity, hatred, and self-righteousness in order that we may in our time progress toward the kingdom which is always already-and-not-yet.

Conclusion

Spirituality is all that we bring to our awareness of and relationship to the ultimate mystery of life. For those of us gathered here, spirituality is all that we bring to our relationship with God revealed through Jesus Christ in the on-going working of the Spirit. That "all" continues the journey and the story which has brought us to this moment and constitutes the journey and the story unfolding into a new moment. Fire images this experience for us. I would suggest, however, that we not only "tend the fire into the third millennium." I would suggest we be the fire, enkindling and joining other conflagrations, always aware that we stand in the ancient burning center, a God afire with love, with us.

I asked an old nun, "How long have you been here?"
"Forever," she answered.
I smiled. "Fifty years, Sister?"
"Forever."
"Did you know Catherine McAuley?"
"We are novices together."
"Did you know Jesus?"
"He and I converse every day."
I threw away my silly smile, fell to my knees, and clutched her hand. "Sister," I whispered. "Did you hear the original sound?"
"I am listening to the original sound."



Notes

- 1 Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 201.
- 2 Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), p. 12.
- 3 Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), p. 345.
- 4 Phyllis A. Tickle, *Rediscovering the Sacred: Spirituality in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p. 101.
- 5 John Lozano, CMC, *Ministerial Spirituality and Religious Life* (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1986), p. 25.
- 6 Anne Clifford, CSJ, in *Claiming Our Truth* (Washington, DC: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1988), p. 41.
- 7 Phyllis Tickle, p. 123.
- 8 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971), p. 238.
- 9 Ibid., p. 235-36.
- 10 Ibid., p. 237-238.
- 11 Ibid., p. 130.
- 12 Thomas Berry, in *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology* edited by Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-third Publications, 1990), pp. 37-38.
- 13 Ibid., p. 108.
- 14 Joyce Rupp, *Dear Heart, Come Home* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), p. 95.
- 15 Patricia Cooney Hathaway, "The Mysticism of Everyday Life" in *Church* (Summer 1994), p. 22 and 23.
- 16 Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), p. 45.
- 17 *Inform* 28 (March 1997): 16.
- 18 *Inform* 28 (February 1997): 20.

Educating for Social Analysis

Making Private Pain Public

Patricia Hartigan, R.S.M.

For many years, the classic statement used to begin any discussion on systemic change or social analysis was the story of the babies floating in the river. You remember how it goes. One day the townspeople noticed a baby floating downstream in the river which ran through their village. Filled with compassion and concern, they scooped the baby out of the water and immediately set out to care for her. The next day, they saw more babies floating down the river. Their compassion and concern led them to set up medical care, foster care, food, and shelter for these babies. After a few days so many babies were floating down the river that they began to be overwhelmed by the amount of services needed to care for them. Finally, someone in the village said, "Let's go up the river and find out what's causing all these babies to float down to our village. Maybe when we know what's causing the problem, we can do something to stop it." And so up the river they went to find answers to the floating babies concern.

And in a sense up the river we go as we begin this Institute Congress. The first question we pose is this all important one "Is picking the babies out of the river and providing

services for them ever enough?" Or, put another way, is direct service without systemic change and empowerment of the people ever enough? Is it enough for us as the service providers? Is it enough for those in distress?

Social analysis leads us to work for structural or systemic change and is a process by which persons examine root causes of social evil. One can approach social analysis in either of two ways: academically or pastorally. The academic approach studies a particular social situation in a detached,

analysis. For us, social analysis can not be treated as an exercise in scholarship but rather as analysis in the service of action for justice.

Social analysis is analysis in the service of action for justice. I think Liz Morancy captured the last part of that statement rather well years ago. Liz said social analysis leads to political ministry and for Liz Morancy political ministry was and is *making private pain public*.

Why would anyone want to make private pain public? For the simple reason that a

*Is picking the babies out of the river
and providing services for them ever
enough? Is direct service without
systemic change and empowerment of
the people ever enough?*

fairly abstract manner, dissecting its elements for the purpose of understanding. The pastoral approach looks at the reality from an involved, historically committed stance discerning the situation for the purpose of action. Our faith tradition, surely our institute direction statement and initiatives call us to the pastoral approach of social

great deal of private pain comes about because of systems and structures which oppress, marginalize, dehumanize, or simply strip people of their basic God-given human dignity and value. The making of private pain public is systemic change. Now as Mercy, we are great at addressing private pain. Mercy responds to people in need of

help. You tell us you need food or a place to sleep. We can find it for you in a matter of minutes. It is Mercy's greatest strength. We take great pride in it. But as with most other things our greatest strength can also be our greatest weakness. We can respond with direct service and we do, and we do it well. What we don't do as well is look to the root causes or the why's of hunger and homelessness and domestic violence. And even if we do find the reasons, we rarely follow through to the root causes. Or, maybe I should say we think we don't. But God has strange, wondrous, and occasionally humorous ways of getting us on board without our even knowing it.

from other countries and cultural realities need not worry that this approach to social analysis will leave you out of the conversation. We who live in this country know quite well that what we call welfare here is what you call an SAP or structural adjustment program at home. Both are geared to the redistribution of wealth and the restructuring of the world debt. Using the Welfare Watch project as a tool for social analysis transcends borders, cultures, and languages. It brings us all to a common place of understanding, for poverty is everywhere and knows no boundaries and it requires that we ask questions together.

Let me explain a bit about the Welfare Watch project,

direct access to basic, statistical information. They gather the information through the use of a professionally developed tool, in this case a questionnaire. The questions contained in this tool ask, among other things, "How long people have been on welfare? How has this new welfare program affected your life? Are the benefits you receive better or worse? How do you pay your rent? Do you have enough money for food and clothing? Does your welfare allotment carry you through the entire month? If not, where do you go for help? Do your relatives and friends help you out? Do you have access to needed human services in your neighborhood?"

The Welfare Watch project is a tool for social analysis, a way of analyzing and hopefully rearranging the attitudes people have regarding poverty in general and people in particular.

As an Institute, we have been engaged in a process of social analysis for a while now. We call it the Welfare Watch project. The project is a tool for social analysis, a way of analyzing and hopefully rearranging the attitudes people have regarding poverty in general and people, in particular, who are poor. Welfare Watch challenges us on a personal level to examine our stereotypes and biases about poverty and those who are poor. Those of you who are

how it is a tool for social analysis and how it can be used by each one of us regardless of where we minister. The Welfare Watch project invites all members, associates, friends, and companions in ministry to participate in various ways in assisting government to look upon those who are poor with different eyes and an open, listening heart. It uses a two-fold approach of monitors and watchers. Monitors are those in direct service positions to those who are poor. They have

These questions are directed to systems in every social organization. They are not specific to the United States, but encompass the needs of every human across this globe. Questions related to *economic* structures include these: "Who are the major employers in your area? Are they major corporations which will abandon your area as soon as another offer is made regardless of where in the world that offer may take them? What jobs are available at what wages? Do the wages provide a living wage or are they subsistence wages or worse, are they exploitative wages where workers are looked upon as commodities in the service of capitalism? How do the choices you make about businesses in your area affect people around the globe?"

The questionnaire addresses *social* and *cultural* questions as well. "Are women, children, and minorities paid or treated differently simply because they belong to a particular racial, gender, or age group? Does the geographic area you reside in consist of all classes or are there obvious racial, class, and age distinctions?" For those using the questionnaire, there are plenty of questions which go beyond the questionnaire which still need to be asked, such as these: "Why are there racial or ethnic divisions in your area? Does it have to be this way? What factors are at play which keep it that way? Are there any groups, political organizations, or churches working to change this situation? Are there religious systems in your area which keep people marginalized? Do some of these religious systems teach that women, children, and minorities have particular roles to play from which they dare not stray? Do these beliefs keep women, children, and minorities in a position of dominance and inferiority never intended by a God of freedom and infinite possibility? How active are these religious systems in the revitalization of the neighborhood and the empowerment of the people?"

We need to ask the *political* questions as well. "If the people here need something such as housing, or food, or medical care to whom do they go for help? Who has the power to affect the lives of this community? Who are the religious

and civic leaders? Where are the civic and religious organizations that are connected to this area? How can they help you? Will they help? Who benefits or loses from their exercise of power? What can they do for this people? What can this people do for them? Who holds power in this particular situation?"

Monitors gather the information for the questionnaire over a period of eighteen months, allowing time for welfare changes to settle into people's lives. The information gathered from the questionnaire is used to challenge present welfare legislation and to formulate a future welfare policy which respects the dignity of each person while honoring an individual's capacity to be a functioning, contributing member of society.

The information gathered also declares to the nation and the world that we as

will not sit idly by and continue to bind up wounds that have no right to even exist in a world created, nourished, and carried by an all-loving and compassionate God. It is a word, a corporate word spoken from the footsteps of pain and accompaniment which says we know what is really going on and we want people in power to know that we will not tolerate it anymore. It is a word which converts and compels and carries us beyond personal motivations to a world where God is in charge.

It is a corporate word which is clear about its bias, for doing social analysis with the mind and heart of God presupposes bias. We have proclaimed and must continue to proclaim and witness to the reality of our solidarity with those who are poor. It is our tradition, our heritage, our faith and our profound commitment. But it is not a word for welfare monitors alone.

The information gathered also declares to the nation and the world that we as Mercy stand with those who are poor. It proclaims our choice to be in their midst and to speak with them.

Mercy stand with those who are poor. It proclaims our choice to be in their midst and to speak with them and for them when they cannot speak for themselves. But it also says something much deeper and more profound. I believe it says boldly and loudly that we

The call of the Welfare Watch project went out to everyone who stands with, for, and in the shoes of those who are poor. Watchers play a very significant role as the agitators and aggravators, if you will, of politicians who want to make cut-backs. Watchers are the

eyes, ears, and heart of the project. They need not be in positions of direct service or administrators of government funded programs. They are, rather, ordinary persons who hope, work, and pray for a better world for all. Their task is to watch what is happening as federal legislation gets translated into state programs.

They, too, have questions to ask. "How will this provision in welfare legislation affect the children and the elderly? Does it cover enough of their expenses to carry them through the month with dignity until the next cash allotment? Does this jobs program which the state is initiating provide skills which are needed and employable right now? Will this skill provide a job with a living wage or just a sustainable one? Will the wage continue to keep this family in poverty? What does the state consider a living wage? A living family wage? Where is the reduction of moneys in welfare programs going? Where on the budget line is it recorded? Why have tax rebates for those with income of \$300,000 a year increased while welfare benefits have decreased?"

When we ask these questions, we acknowledge that there are systems functioning

in society and the world which govern our lives. We have names for these systems. They are the economic, cultural, political, religious, and social systems found in every society, organization, and institution. The challenge to us is to name and acknowledge them while at the same time refusing to allow their domination of our lives.

Now some of you may still be saying, "But I don't live in this country. I don't minister to anyone on welfare." That is not the point. The systems which affect us here are the same systems which affect poor people in Argentina, Panama, Jamaica, Haiti, or the Philippines. There are institutions and systems which link us in a common humanity of pain and suffering as well as a humanity of hope. The same questions need to be asked of citizens and governments no matter where we live. And if we live here in the United States, but don't have impoverished persons on welfare, we need to ask why. Why aren't they eligible? Is it because they are here illegally? Or are they in a group here legally while we use their labor and then discard them? Are they not on welfare because they make just enough from their retirement

and pension benefits to provide basic necessities for themselves but not enough to stop worrying about tomorrow or beyond? Are they not on it because they have no address and therefore can't be listed on the welfare rolls? All these questions bring us to the same reality, the reality of prevalent poverty in our world. Poverty will never be eradicated from this earth unless and until we all see it as interconnected, intertwined through every system, every institution in every country affecting all persons regardless of their power, class, race, sex, or status. It is eating away at the very fabric of what we call life and it needs to be stopped.

The message for all of us is this: as persons called to the gospel message, energized, challenged, and enlivened by the Institute Direction Statement and Initiatives, no matter where we find ourselves in ministry, our call is *to political ministry in the service of action for justice*.

We can take that message home and have it framed and even hang it on our wall. We can look at it every day and feel warm and comfortable about it. Or we can allow our God and the people we encounter each day to enter into our innermost parts, hearts and souls and begin or renew again the journey to hope and liberation for all people. For that is the task of social analysis, the journey to hope and liberation for all people, including most importantly, ourselves.

When we ask these questions, we acknowledge that there are systems functioning in society and the world which govern our lives.

The task of defining something can be a rather easy affair. Living it out is quite another challenge. If we believe we are about a political ministry in the service of action for justice then we need to find ways of bringing about justice. This requires not only deep faith, hard work and courage but also development, understanding and use of necessary tools and skills.

Social analysis is one of those tools. It is a many faceted discipline. For most people, it would conclude with what has just been presented. But for us, as people of faith, it carries another challenge as well—that of forgiveness. While social analysis seeks to confront, tear down and completely eliminate those systems which are outrightly and blatantly destructive, and which crush, if not totally extinguish, the human person and spirit, the follower of Jesus Christ is

called to extend forgiveness to those very persons who seek to destroy all that we hold precious. Forgiveness does not mean that we ignore the reality of personal and social sin all around us. Forgiveness here means that we confront the sinful structures of our world and acknowledge them as such. It also means that we are not naive about the persons who carry out the destruction of what is good. As we go about doing the work of social analysis and structural change and in our desire for and work in support of a new world, a world of the “kingdom” of God, we need to constantly remind ourselves that God’s work is ultimately about mercy and forgiveness. No one can be excluded from our forgiveness. Not even ourselves. For it is in the healing which forgiveness brings that we ultimately find our true selves and our God.

In closing, let us take a moment to bring into our consciousness all those who suffer the effects of sinful structures and those who maintain them. Let us also bring into our conscious awareness all those who while not actually involved in sinful structures, by their silence have allowed them to destroy whole peoples and cultures. Let us now draw into this circle of mercy and forgiveness ourselves and ask God to heal us of the anger and hatred we harbor within our own hearts.

We can pray: Loving God, you sent your child Jesus not to teach us how to die but rather how to live. Jesus’ life was about forgiveness, acceptance and merciful love. As we continue on our journey of hope and liberation for all people, teach us the same . . . For the circle of mercy is timeless.



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The Church in Process

The Challenges of Conciliar Reception

Mary Ellen Sheehan, I.H.M.

(Presented to the Sisters of Mercy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 21, 1996)

Over thirty years ago, the Second Vatican Council opened some windows and the breezes began to blow. The winds of culture and the breath of the Holy Spirit intermingled and created a new atmosphere. The council was a moment, but a defining one, in a process that had begun some thirty or so years before. Scholarship in scripture, liturgy, and the church had begun to challenge the prevailing theology of the church, and the encounter with cultures in missionary areas had begun to challenge the exclusive character of a European and Council-of-Trent shaped church identity. It was time to look again at the church in the modern world.

through three long sessions spread out over four years and it took another twenty years or so for the church to work out in more detail the massive renewal agenda that it had set for itself. Some of the fruits of these years include the following: the restoration of the importance of Scripture to spiritual and pastoral life; the reform of all the sacramental rites; new catechetical processes, such as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*; ecumenical dialogue and improved inter-faith relationships; the pursuit of justice as constitutive to fidelity to the gospel of Christ; the promotion of lay identity and ministry in the church; the revisioning of evangelization and

And now we are in another stage of the process, namely, what theologians call the time of *reception*. In the best of times, reception is a difficult process. It means grasping the vision, internalizing it both individually and collectively, and acting as a whole to effect the necessary change in beliefs, ritual, ethics, and the nature and structures of authority. It means discussion, debate, dialogue, and discernment. It means periods of testing and tension. It means education and conversion. But we must also add that our times, some thirty years after the council, are themselves filled with new local and global challenges. Thus, the context for the reception of the council is by no means the best of times in the sense of a stable time where change comes easily. There is a new diversity of values and interpretation in our day, some of which are set in opposition to each other.

In this paper, I want to consider this phenomenon and its consequences for us as women in the church. My reflections will unfold in the following way. First, I will present a description of the church in order to put forth what it means to be church identified.

Over thirty years ago, the Second Vatican Council opened some windows and the breezes began to blow.

Now if the council was a moment in a larger process, it was also a process itself, both with respect to how it carried out its deliberations and with respect to the agenda it set for the Christian world to contemplate. The council proceeded

inculturation; the promulgation of the revised Code of Canon Law; the restoration of episcopal collegiality; the renewal of religious life; and the revision of the meaning of ordained ministry.

Secondly, I will select for reflection some issues that challenge us as church today. Thirdly, I will offer some suggestions on how to live with these issues as women in the church today.

Embracing the Complex Reality Called Church

The church is a complex, living, dynamic reality. It has many features, faces, and forces. Its history is long and diverse, fruitful and troublesome, promising and perplexing. It cannot be defined simply and succinctly. While, for legitimate historical reasons, the Council of Trent did formulate and promote such a succinct understanding of the church as the perfect society with its consequent clear and distinct divisions of church order and authority, such an understanding, especially in the juridical excesses that gradually accrued to it, many of which were further emphasized in the 1869 Vatican I Council, is no longer adequate. The church must be described more fully through interfacing images and interlacing concepts, drawn from our wider biblical and theological inheritance. I would like to look first at a few of the compelling biblical images that, if we embrace them deeply, will root us in our difficult times and in our task of reception.

1. *The New Creation in Christ.* This challenging image

of the church appears prominently in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

When any one is united to Christ, there is a new act of creation; the old order has gone and a new order has already begun. (2 Cor 5: 17)

This creation theme had its precedents in the Hebrew tradition, expressed both in Genesis and in the prophetic tradition of Israel.

God created humankind in God's own image; in the divine image God created us; male and female God created us . . . At the end of the sixth day, God looked at everything created and found it very good. (Gen 1: 27, 31)

We are the people whom God formed and fashioned according to God's own heart. We are the people whom Jesus, the great prophet and full presence of God in our midst, called into discipleship and mission. Think of what it means to stand in this tradition as church: we are the image of God made full in our union with Christ. We are a new creation, a spring arising in the desert!

2. *Branches of the Living Vine in the Vineyard of God.* John Paul II, drawing on the Gospels of Matthew and John, invoked this striking metaphor

*We are the people whom God formed
and fashioned, the people whom Jesus
called into discipleship.*

While time showed that our original God-rooted goodness became distorted through our forgetfulness and our turning away from it in sin, the prophetic tradition insisted on its validity and on God's faithfulness to it.

When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown, when you walk through the flames you shall not be burned; the flame will not consume you . . . See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? . . . I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise. (Is 43:2, 19, 20-21)

in his 1988 *Apostolic Exhortation on the Laity in the Church and the World*. In the midst of Matthew's parable on the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20), the text reads, You too go into the vineyard to labor." (Mt 20:4). While this text has been interpreted traditionally to apply to people called to priesthood and religious life in the church, Vatican II made it clear that it applies to all Christians. Matthew uses this image, coupled with other parables, such as the sower and the seed (Mt 13: 4-23) and the harvest in need of laborers (Mt 9:37), to create a picture of the church that is both appealing and challenging. The church is a commu-

nity of coworkers. Rooted in the word of God, the workers overcome their own resistance and the weeds in the affairs of the world to bond together in community. Matthew teaches that we are all called to nurture the seed, to bear fruit in the vineyard of God, to extend God's desire for life and love to permeate human culture and all of creation.

It is in the gospel of John, of course, where the image appears so profoundly in its

your bearing much fruit and becoming my disciples (Jn 15:1-8)

These texts in Matthew and John are about our profound identity in God through Christ and about our call to discipleship. They present the church as an intimate communion of disciples, whose work is to sustain trimming and to nurture life. Think of what it means to be a branch with other branches on the vine whose life force is Jesus Christ and

witness to and realize the reign of God in our midst, as it was proclaimed, lived, and already realized in Jesus whom we follow. Our gifts differ, but we all have some. They are real, given to us by God, and they exist for one reason only: to build up the body, to strengthen it, to encourage and console, and to care especially for the least among us. Now these gifts, Paul teaches, are grounded more profoundly in the great gifts of God—faith, *hope*, and *love*—and the greatest of these great gifts is love. Think of what it means to live as a church from this proclamation: "You are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it. You all have gifts to be released for the realization of God's reign. Set your hearts also, all of you, on the greater gifts."

Now, the proclamation in these great biblical descriptions of the church has also been expressed in great ideas, which have arisen over the centuries from theological reflection. I will identify a few of these thickly-layered, tensively-related themes now, offering only a brief reflection on them, and this for several reasons. First, they permeate all contemporary ecclesiastical statements, theological discourse, and pastoral practice and so we are affected by them daily. Secondly, we must grasp them and learn how to hold them together creatively in order to anchor ourselves as a church in this time of turbulence and discernment. Thirdly, we must learn how to read and resist

Christ is the head and we, who are animated by the Holy Spirit of God, are the members. We exist as the body to build up the new creation.

Christological dimension. The gospel writer presents Jesus as saying:

I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. He prunes away every barren branch, but the fruitful ones he trims clean to increase their yield. You are clean already, thanks to the word I have spoken to you. Live on in me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who live in me and I in them will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing. One who does not live in me is like a withered, rejected branch picked up to be thrown in the fire and burnt. If you live in me, and my words stay part of you, you may ask what you will. It will be done for you. My Father has been glorified in

whose grower is God, pruning, trimming, and nurturing tenderly to increase the yield.

3. *The Body of Christ in the Diversity of its Members.* It is in the epistles attributed to Paul—especially Ephesians, Colossians, and Corinthians—that the image of the church as the body of Christ abounds. Christ is the head and we, who are animated by the Holy Spirit of God, are the members. We exist as the body to build up the new creation, the kinship family of God. Through our baptism, confirmation, and eucharistic participation, we are given gifts to exercise services or ministries in the body.

We are proclaimers, teachers, prophets, administrators, healers, consolers, and workers of justice and reconciliation. We are called to bear

the tendency to collapse the tensions in church life today too soon, whether this occurs in ecclesiastical statements, theological reflection, or pastoral practice.

1. *The Church is Incarnational and Eschatological.* We must understand thoroughly that the church is an *already* and also a *not yet* reality. The church is an *already* reality in the sense that God is with us fully in creation, in Jesus Christ, and in us through our baptism, confirmation, and eucharistic identity. But the church is also *not yet* in that the wholeness of the body and the full expression of the gifts of its members are not yet realized. We are marked by our historical condition which means that sin still abounds in us, individually and in structures of oppression and exclusion that block out God's image in the world and stifle God's vision for the world.

2. *The Church is Mystical and Prophetic.* This tensive reality between the *already* and not yet character of the church is also expressed in terms of the mystical and prophetic character of the church. The New Testament portrayal of Jesus expresses this dynamic clearly. On the one hand, Jesus is presented to us as totally at one with God, living in a radical and mystical identity with God. He was already in God fully. On the other hand, he went about his life's work, not in satisfaction with the fullness of life he enjoyed, but rather as a prophet. He *denounced* the distortions and

excluding behavior that he saw around him and *announced* instead a new and inclusive discipleship and ministry. He made the situation of the poor and excluded ones of this earth his special concern, even to the point of identifying them as the true signs of the reign of God. So, if we believe that the historical community that we call church is the continuation of Christ in our midst, then it too must be at once both mystical and prophetic. There is no genuine mysticism that rests in its completion and withdraws from prophetic action and there is no genuine prophecy that centers only in its action and withdraws from mystical identity with God.

Jesus made the situation of the poor and excluded ones of this earth his special concern. If we believe that the historical community that we call church is the continuation of Christ in our midst, then it too must be at once both mystical and prophetic.

3. *The Church is Mystery, Communion, and Sacrament.* These are dynamic themes that have emerged from the Second Vatican Council. They have ancient roots, but they are accruing new meaning as we dialogue anew with our contemporary times. They permeate post Vatican II ecclesiastical statements and theological reflection, and they are subject to many interpretations,

arising from diverse cultural conditions and pastoral needs.

The church, Vatican II teaches, "... is in the nature of *sacrament*—a sign and instrument, that is, of *communion* with God and of unity among all human beings..." (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). The Church is also a mystery in the sense that it is "... the kingdom of Christ already present in *mystery*..." which "grows visibly through the power of God in the world" (*LG*, 3). Now, it must be maintained that the biblical understanding of *mystery* is the root reality of the church. But what does it mean concretely to say that the church is in the nature of a *sacrament*, that it is a clear and visible sign of our com-

munion with God and of our unity with our brothers and sisters as shown to us by Jesus? And what does it mean concretely to say that the church is a *communion* of believers amidst all of their cultural diversity? These are challenging questions as the church tries to shed itself of its triumphalism in the face of the power of the poor as signs of the reign of God and as it tries to become genuinely a world church.

Issues in the Process of Conciliar Reception

All of the changes brought about by Vatican II that I recalled above, from the restoration of Scripture to the revision of the meaning of ordained ministry, are still in a process of development and reception. Thirty years is both a long time and a short time. It is a long time when we stop to realize all that has issued forth from the council and it is a short time when we ponder all that yet needs to come to fruition as the conciliar agenda interacts with newer world developments, such as the globalization of the economy, ecology and cosmology, the women's movement, world religions, and authority in the social order and the church. I want to focus now on just a few issues that are ongoing agenda from Vatican II, ones that are particularly challenging because they entail a deeper level of change in church authority and structures.

All of the changes brought about by Vatican II, from the restoration of Scripture to the revision of the meaning of ordained ministry, are still in a process of development and reception.

1. *The Pursuit of Justice as an Evangelical Imperative.* When Central and South American churches embraced the conciliar message on the constitutive link between faith and justice, theology as an

ethical process of structural analysis came into being and its effects were felt round the globe. A theology from below, one rooted both in the witness of Jesus and in a concrete analysis of the conditions of the poor, rose up as a spring in the midst of the desert. But now, scholars and pastoral agents tell us that just as the poor are gaining voice, there are efforts, both from church and civil authorities, to stop up the springs of the base communities because they are too political. Is this a retreat back into the separation of the sacred and the secular, the beginning again of a church acting more juridically than from a vision of justice?

This must not happen, and especially at this time of increase, not decrease, of unrestricted capitalism with its ever more devastating consequences on the poor, both in the south and the north and in the east and the west. There are signs of hope, however, both in the mystical/prophetic spirituality of resistance and in

springs of liberation theology? This is an urgent issue today.

2. *The Women's Movement as a Sign of the Times.* Along with worker's rights and global political self-determination, John XXIII recognized women's rights as one of the signs of our times. In the encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, paragraph 41, he wrote:

... the part that women are now playing in political life is everywhere evident. This is a development that is perhaps of swifter growth among Christian nations, but it is also happening extensively, if more slowly, among nations that are heirs to different traditions and imbued with a deferent culture. Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons.

Now, few people, including perhaps even John XXIII, could have predicted how strongly the women's movement would take root and how it would affect the life of the church. Granted, there is a wide spectrum of positions and agenda in the movement, many of which need deeper analysis and ongoing discernment. But the early critique of the movement, that it was merely a North American phenomenon infested with a wrong-headed individualism, false and simplistic as that critique was, just does not hold

an increasing ecological consciousness. How will we as a church stay the course, bear the burdens of the members of the body, survive the birth pangs of the new creation, and drink freely from the well-

up today. The globalization of the movement, with its attending analysis of the pervasive and death-dealing structures of domination, oppression, and marginalization, have proved the critics wrong.

By and large, women have not feared looking at their differences based on race and class, and rather than propagating divisions, they have sought to bring about a new creation through dialogue and networks of solidarity. If one woman suffers, then all suffer. If one branch is withered, then all the branches will die. But life, just as it flows through the bodies of women everywhere, must draw up the new and fresh water of the women's movement into the vine and into the body of Christ. The church must close the gap between its preaching on the dignity and gifts of women and its practice of continuing to exclude us from its own life.

This movement, even as it contributes to tensions in the church, must not weaken. If we are made as women in God's image, then God needs the full expression of our humanity to come forth. God waits and groans with us in this time of crisis and offers all of us the gift of courage to withstand the attempts to smother or curtail this new creation. If the church is in the nature of a sacrament and is a communion of all its members, then the church needs our witness as sign of God. We must continue to pursue justice in this matter

and not fall prey to promoting ourselves the sin of sexism by refusing to accept, embrace, and enhance our full humanity. To do so is to inhibit the reign of God, made manifest through us.

*If we are made as women in God's
image, then God needs the full
expression of our humanity to come
forth.*

3. *The Exercise of Authority and Ministries in the Church.* There is a way in which it can be said that no structure, whether of Caesars or of Popes, can inhibit us from the experience of God and our expression of its fruits in service to culture and creation. But there is another way in which it cannot be said. We all live and work in social and ecclesiological systems of ordering, whether that be as parents, teachers, health care workers, welfare recipients, or retirees. The church, after all, is a society. Our religious experience is mediated through the Scriptures, liturgy, and prayer in its many other forms. Our gifts of the Spirit are conferred through the sacraments. They are cultivated through distinct traditions, flowering forth from Benedict, Dominic, Ignatius, Teresa of Avila, Catherine McAuley, Theresa Maxis, Dorothy Day, or Jean Vanier.

But now a new challenge has arisen for spirituality and

ministry in our day, namely, the restoration of the call to holiness and ministry for all the members of the body of Christ. For the most part, this call to holiness and ministry will continue to be expressed

in the ordinary activities of life: in parenting, friendship, care-giving and receiving, and in one's life work. But increasingly, people are also seeking to serve in the realm of ecclesiastical ministry, whether as evangelists, catechists, chaplains, spiritual directors, pastors, pastoral workers, canon lawyers, or theologians. Now much of this new creation is already happening and has been welcomed by the church, considered in this instance as a structurally ordered society. But some have not been received, when authority has exercised itself as power rather than service or when fear rather than hope in the new vision of church has taken hold.

Most of us are only too keenly aware of the many ironies at work in this situation. It is the church itself that has generated the need for new ministries by the reform agenda of Vatican II, but at the same time it is the church itself which allows some members to wither away from thirst and

starvation by being deprived of the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments. This has been a phenomenon for a very long time now in large parts of the earth. Thus, two things are happening at once: the long-standing, but by no means absolute, pattern of ordering authority and ministry in the church has been maintained, even as it is also being challenged as no longer adequate for the proper reception and ordering of the burgeoning gifts of the Spirit, appearing everywhere and in abundance.

How do we live today as women who love the church and yet often still feel marginalized or restricted in the exercise of our gifts for pastoral leadership?

Now this is a very big pastoral problem. The church as a society needs a certain order and authority in its patterning of ministry in order to build up, sustain, and extend its life. Gifts for ecclesiastical service, as they are appearing among God's people need to be identified, cultivated, and discerned. But current structures and the exercise of authority, it appears to many but by no means all the members of the body, are no longer adequate to receive and order the gifts. We are pressed to ask: How will the new life, and the more of it that is yet to come, be welcomed fully and ordered creatively? How will the inclusion of the gifts of more members

be received and integrated into certain patterns of stability, necessary for the church as a society? How long will the judgment be upheld that women are unfit as sacramental mediators because we are thought to be lacking the ability by reason of our sex to be signs of the image of God, the headship of Christ, and the animating power of the Holy Spirit?

Another pressure in this great pastoral problem lies in the connection of jurisdiction, both sacramentally and legally, to ordination. While it is

companying tendency to tighten up the monarchical pattern, even at the expense of the older tradition of episcopal collegiality. The church has had to face the balancing of papal and episcopal authority many times before in its long history. But never before has it had the challenge it has today to find and establish new structures of genuine dialogue and a true welcome of the gifts of all the people, gifts which it has itself called forward. There are signs, however, in all part of the world that it is time for a new creation in this matter, too.

Living with the Issues as Women in the Church Today

I shall be short and succinct in this last part of my paper in the hopes that I have already laid the foundations for my response to this pressing pastoral problem: How do we live today as women who love the church and yet often still feel marginalized or restricted in the exercise of our gifts for pastoral leadership?

1. *Enjoin the Mystical and Prophetic Tradition.* First of all, we must be prophetic mystics or mystical prophets, whichever wording one prefers. We need to cultivate our communion with God and our communion with each other as two sides of one coin. We need to go deep into this experience in order to be grounded for today's civic and ecclesiastical struggles.

true that the church is not a democracy, neither is it an empire or a monarchy. But in fact in its legal structure, it so functions, for there is no real voice or decision-making in the church, except by those who are ordained. How will genuine participation come about? What changes must occur in the patterns of authority to welcome the new voices? How will we correlate the new proclamation on lay responsibility in and for the church with its existing juridical structure?

This pastoral problem of authority and ministries will be with us for a long time. There are signs of great struggles still ahead, with the ac-

2. *Receive Fully That We Are Made in God's Image.* We must embrace fully our humanity as truly formed in God's image. Centuries of distorted teaching and harmful pastoral practice have battered away at this, wresting from us our birthright. We need to be in solidarity with all women in this matter, learning from others and also teaching others that never is it God's will that we be subjects of exclusion or violence, in whatever its form. We need to be concrete about this by organizing our social power for change.

3. *Read and Study Scripture and Theology.* We need to have the ability to assess ecclesiological statements, theological developments, and pastoral practice from knowledge as well as from personal and communal experience. Prophetic action requires discernment and discernment requires knowledge. The worst thing that can happen to us is to be rendered vulnerable or powerless by lack of knowledge.

4. *Claim the Full Meaning of Communion through Dialogue and Solidarity.* Living a church-shaped life requires identity, but it also means learning how to live with diversity. We must resist the temptation to collapse this tension between identity and diversity by choosing one side over the other too easily. The plurality in our social and ecclesial world is real, and it must be approached through genuine dialogue and structures of solidarity, if we are to overcome the pattern of domination of one group over

another through unexamined assumptions about the nature of identity. We must enlarge the boundaries of identity by new forms of participation and new efforts at dialogue with those who are different from us.

5. *Nurture the New Creation in Compassion and Courage.* We

dialogue and short-circuiting the process of necessary change in church practice and structures.

7. *Play and Enjoy.* Our sisters and brothers in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have taught us that to sing and dance, even in the midst of their terrible travails, is not a

The ability to live today with the tensions of conciliar reception is a matter of the great gifts of God—faith in times of darkness, hope in periods of discouragement, and love in the struggle with anger.

must find the new shoots of life on the vine and nurture them through our *faith, hope, and love*. We must be tender and full of mercy as coworkers in the vineyard. But we must also be strong and courageous in seeking justice, and especially as we are confronted with authority exercised as *power over* rather than as *service for* the enhancement of the reign of God.

6. *Resist Instructions to Be Silent on Women and Ordination.* Even as there is resistance to it, there is also progress toward the incorporation of women fully in the ministerial structures of the church, both at the level of theological reflection and pastoral practice. We must be strong against the tendency of what some scholars call *creeping infallibility*, that is, the tendency to invoke this doctrine where it does not apply in the hopes of cutting off

contradiction but rather a way to express hope and solidarity with each other. Catherine McAuley, too, was always ready for a good gab, a warm cup of tea, and a nurturing walk in the gardens of Dublin. And Jesus enjoyed the wonder of children and good meals and weddings with his friends.

By way of conclusion, then, let me say that for the rest, the ability to live today with the tensions of conciliar reception is a matter of the great gifts of God—*faith* in times of darkness, *hope* in periods of discouragement, and *love* in the struggle with anger. Catherine McAuley knew these great gifts, and as well she passed on her own special gifts to help us: *tenderness, mercy, and courage.*



Together in Service

A Reflection About Women Religious in the Diocese of Sacramento

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

(The original draft was authored by Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., in collaboration with the Religious Women of the Diocese of Sacramento, in northern California. The final editing was done by Katherine Doyle, R.S.M, and Patricia Simpson, O.P., and affirmed at the annual gathering of women religious on May 16, 1997. *MAST Journal* is grateful for a copy of this final version to Maureen McInerney, O.P., Vicar for Religious and Assistant Director of Vocations in Sacramento).

Responsive to the call of the Church to reflect upon the core of our lives and the aspirations of our hearts, we, the women religious living and ministering in the Diocese of Sacramento, have accepted the invitation of Bishop William Weigand to "study with him further forms of leadership and empowerment of women in the Diocese." We recognize our voice as one

Christ came for the liberation of all persons. It is in the context of Christ's liberating message that we, as consecrated women, share our experience of God among us and our response to God's revelatory love. As women religious we offer to this moment that gift of wisdom which is the fruit of our consecrated life, our tradition of service within this diocese, and the discovery of God's

mento predates the establishment of the Sacramento Diocese in 1886. We are women who have received a rich heritage of faith, a passion for the service of God's people and a mandate to center ourselves in Christ Jesus. Our lives are at the service of the mission for "it can be said that the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life."¹

As women religious we profess our love of God through our profession of poverty, chastity and obedience lived out through lives of prayer and service. We seek to discern the call of the Spirit in responding to the needs of our times. In the days of the Gold Rush, pioneer women religious came to this community to care for the most needy and abandoned. Sisters established schools, orphanages, nursed the sick in their homes, instructed adults and children in the basics of faith, visited the imprisoned and comforted the dying. In times of crisis they volunteered their service to care for typhoid victims; in floods, they minis-

It is in the context of Christ's liberating message that we, as consecrated women, share our experience of God among us and our response to God's revelatory love.

among the voices of women in the local Church. This reflection is offered by way of encouraging a full exploration of this topic by all women of the Diocese. Only by listening to the voices of all women will we be able to claim the richness of the Spirit's movement among us. We are animated and made strong in the realization that

revelation in the joys, struggles and challenges of our present experience as women in the Roman Catholic Church.

Who Are We?

We are 208 women religious representing twenty-seven religious communities. Our service to the church of Sacra-

tered from boats. Their convents sometimes burned and they endured the consequences of poor nutrition and damp housing. They shared in the lot of the people they served.

In diverse ways, moved by the founding insight of their congregations, sisters collaborated with clergy and laity in building up the church in holiness, charity and justice. Sustained by the Gospel of Jesus, our pioneer mothers in faith willingly accepted the privations, hardships and prejudices they experienced.

Since these times this same reality impels women who embraced the call to consecrated life to speak out for equality of all women in church and in society. Women religious have been advocates and activists for the rights and dignity of all women. By providing refuge, education and encouragement to the women of their time, many women religious resisted the cultural conditioning of their epoch, a condition that deprived women of basic rights, opportunities and dignity which is their God given birthright.

The Role of Women Religious

Just as women religious of the past sought to respond to the most urgent needs of their times, today's women religious seek to respond to the needs of the people of God in modes appropriate to these times. Sisters in the Sacramento Diocese currently min-

ister in many and diverse roles: education, counseling, healthcare in all its aspects, social service, housing, spiritual direction and retreat ministry, chaplaincy, pastoral associates and parish ministers, jail and prison visitation, religious formation of adults and ministries with youth, ministry to the homeless and poor, ministry to elderly and aging, including those in our families.

Our role as women religious calls us to witness to the reality of a communion that transcends gender, role and personal preference.

The role and gift of women in consecrated life is not reducible to works alone. Women religious stand in the midst of the Church as a sign of deep faith. "In effect, the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it 'manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling' and the striving of the whole Church as Bride toward union with her one Spouse."²

Our role as women religious calls us to witness to the reality of a communion that transcends gender, role and personal preference. We witness to that oneness of faith and life which is the legacy of our Baptism.

The equal dignity of all members of the Church is the work of the Spirit, is rooted in Baptism and Confirmation and is strengthened by the Eucha-

rist. But diversity is also a work of the Spirit. It is [the Spirit] who establishes the church as an organic communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries.³ We live a prophetic, charismatic way of life which compels us to an ongoing self-evangelization. This way of life calls us to publicly challenge forces, systems and practices which diminish a person's ability to grow into

the fullness of his or her humanity. It demands that we name those patterns of injustice where they exist and seek to build a strong fabric of right relationships.

The role of religious women in the Sacramento Diocese, therefore, is threefold. By our lives we must witness to the love of God for all people and to the inner communion of the Trinity; by our service we must assist in building the reign of God upon earth and witness to the love of God shown forth in Jesus; by our prophetic call we must call ourselves, the church and the world to a union of word and act.

Influences of History and Culture

As women religious we live out our vocation within a specific

historical time and culture. Unfortunately, we are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves, and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.⁴

The Church which we love has not been exempt from the attitudes and behaviors which have contributed to the diminishment of women's dignity.

The Church which we love has not been exempt from the attitudes and behaviors which have contributed to the diminishment of women's dignity.

Past discussions and writings of the church theologians and leaders have, at times, negated women's value, wisdom, contributions and baptismal right. Writings such as the twelfth century Gratianus Decretum declaring that "woman is not made in the image of God," and the papal writings of Pope Honorius III affirming that same perspective a century later have contributed to building a climate in which a woman's inclusion on the levels of decision-making and her ability to

break open the word of God in preaching were forbidden. This belief that woman's soul was deficient, and that therefore she did not image the immanence of God, was echoed in the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. Thomistic thought held that woman could not be ordained or proclaim God's word because of this deficiency.

The cumulative impact and formative influence of such teachings upon the attitudes and practices of the church over the centuries cannot be underestimated. Such exclusion from the inner functioning of the Church's life has resulted in an impoverishment of vision and a diminishment of the feminine dimension in church policies and

practices. It is at this important juncture in the life of the Church that she has called herself, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "to be willing to foster feminine participation in every way in its internal life."⁵

Heeding the call of people John Paul II to strive for equality of participation of men and women in the life of the church, the United States bishops in 1994 called for a study of "alternative ways in which women can exercise leadership in the Church. We

welcome this leadership, which in some ways is already a reality, and we commit ourselves to enhancing the participation of women in every possible aspect of Church life."⁶ The American bishops did not define the shape or specifics that such leadership roles form women might take. The "how" and the "what" are left to be shaped by dialogue, exploration and experience. What the bishops make clear is that continued exclusion of women from significant leadership roles within the church is not acceptable. The roots for this commitment are more than pragmatic. The empowerment of women in the church touches the church's own self-identity. . . . Pope John Paul II emphasizes that [the role of women] is of capital importance . . . for the discovery by believers of the true face of the Church."⁷

Gospel Model of Jesus

The paradigm for the role of women in the church is found in the life of Jesus. "Jesus' attitude to the women whom he meets in the course of his messianic service reflects the eternal plan of God, who in creating each [woman] chooses her and loves her in Christ" (cf. Eph 1:1-5). Each woman from the 'beginning' inherits as a woman the dignity of personhood. Jesus of Nazareth confirms this dignity, recalls it, renews it and makes it part of the Gospel and of the redemption for which he is sent into the he

world. Every word and gesture of Christ about women must therefore be brought into the dimension of the paschal mystery."⁸

John Paul II in his Letter to Women places the call to free women from all forms of oppression in the context of the Gospel.

When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the Gospel contains a very relevant message which goes back to the attitude of Jesus Christ himself. Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness. In this way he honored the dignity which women have always possessed according to God's plan and in his love."⁹

The women of the Gospel provide a mosaic of relationships with Jesus. The company of women journeyed with him on his apostolic mission and provided for him out of their resources. Both Magdalene and the woman at the well provide us with models of evangelizing proclamation. Mary and Martha invite us to enter into the intimate bonds of friendship with Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters of Paul, women emerge as significant persons in the life of the early church. It is the witness of the poor widow who gives her all to God that challenges our hesitancy to entrust ourselves to the Provident God. Most of all, we find the model of discipleship and fi-

delity in the person of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. These Gospel models provide us with the path we must follow.

It is the task of the church to reclaim for itself the mind and heart of Christ in his relationships to women, a relationship that cherished, affirmed, empowered and liberated the women of his time. "Vita Consecrata" puts it this way: Having received from Christ a message of liberation, the Church has the mission to proclaim this message prophetically, promoting

It is the task of the church to reclaim for itself the mind and heart of Christ in his relationships to women, a relationship that cherished, affirmed, empowered and liberated the women of his time.

ways of thinking and acting which correspond to the mind of the Lord."¹⁰

Our Present Reality

The shape of our response to God's revelation emerges from our present reality. This is a time of paradox for women religious. We feel keenly the phenomenon of diminishment. The majority of our congregations are smaller and older than they were a decade ago. Societal conditions have created greater gaps between the rich and the poor. This has had an impact upon the spirit of those who are called to consecrated life.

In the Sacramento Diocese the number of women religious has decreased. The number of women seeking admission to our communities is small. The 208 women religious of the diocese do not know each other well and we have few collaborative projects among us. While women religious are represented in diocesan leadership, parish ministries and the pastoral ministries of the local church, the concerns of women are under-represented in diocesan priorities.

We share a mixed experience. Some women religious have been gifted with support, encouragement and responsibility by their local clergy and parish communities; others find their insights ignored or dismissed. Some, while seeking to be of service to the people of God, have difficulty finding appropriate ministry positions. While many of our religious congregations have adopted forms of governance based on participative models, consensus and discernment, we minister within systems or institutions which are based on hierarchical governance models.

While we hunger for the Bread of the Eucharist, we

find ourselves, like the local church itself, sometimes without opportunity for daily Eucharist. While dedicating ourselves to the full implementation of the renewal asked by the Second Vatican Council, we sometimes find ourselves in situations where such reforms are not permitted by our pastoral leadership. Like Mary watching the passion of Jesus, we sometimes feel powerless to assuage the pain of the suffering people of God, their material pain and their spiritual pain. It is out of this reality that we name the challenges which lie before us:

Promotion of the role of women cannot be done apart from the context of promoting the role of laity in the church. The challenge of today's church is the empowerment of all its members.

Challenges

1. Faithfulness to the call of the church challenges us to open dialogue on the dignity, role and gift of women in the church. It calls for dialogue seeking conversion or what the church names as the "charity of dialogue."

2. All the people of God, but most especially those in decision-making roles, are called to promote the rights of women in today's church. In the words of John Paul II: 'Who can imagine the great advantages to pastoral care and new beauty that the church's face will assume when the

feminine genius is fully involved in the various areas of her life?'¹¹

3. To be faithful to itself the church is challenged to discover ways in which to give women voice in governance. An element of belonging is the ability to shape the life of the body to which one belongs. The American Bishops call for the greater exploration of the modes of consultation and co-operation in the exercise of authority.¹²

4. Promotion of the role of women cannot be done apart from the context of promoting the role of laity in the

church. The challenge of today's church is the empowerment of all its members in order that the greatest diversity of gifts might flourish for the reign of God.

5. In faithfulness to our prophetic call, we must accept the challenge of facing the injustices we see around us. Among those injustices are those which are particular to women, e.g. "the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men."¹³

We are called to denounce the evils of racism, sexism, ageism, and all other practices or beliefs that oppress persons.

6. We must embrace the challenge of being creative in looking for and developing new forms of leadership in service. We must call forth the best of our creative imagination and organizational skills in revisioning the manner in which leadership is exercised within the contemporary church. While we share a common concern about the challenge of new forms of leadership, we are of common mind what roles this leadership should include.

7. Language creates attitudes which shape our way of thinking and relating. Affirming the dignity and equality of women before God challenges us to use language which is inclusive of all. Observance of the criteria for use of inclusive language within liturgical settings set forth by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1990 should be normative in all worship settings and in documents prepared by the diocese. Overcoming the earlier bias that women are not made in the image of likeness of God can be offset by consistent use of the multiple metaphors for God used in the Scriptures.

8. The most essential challenge is to develop and implement a process that is inclusive of all women, lay and religious, in addressing these enduring concerns. In every phase of this process, all

women's voices need to be heard. We recommend that the Bishop establish a Commission on Women's Concerns which would be empowered to address the concerns of women in the church and society.

9. Our final challenge is one of personal and communal conversion. The authenticity of our witness is directly related to the radical manner in which all women religious live out the demands of their way of life. Just as church and society have been shaped by the times and influences of the culture, women religious have been subject to the cultural conditioning of their times. Both the church and women

devoted to the consecrated life must distinguish between what is of God and what is of time. We must keep our hearts alive and possess a determination to be who we say we are.

We begin the exploration in faith and openness to the Spirit. We bring to it the women who we are, broken but blessed, sinful but graced. May what God has begun in us come to its fullness that the glory of God and the people of God may be served.



Notes

1. John Paul II, "Vita Consecrata" #25, 1996.
2. "Vita Consecrata," #3.
3. "Vita Consecrata," #31.
4. John Paul II, "Letter to Women," #3.
5. John Paul II, "On Fully Fostering Women's Role," #1, 1995.
6. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, United States Catholic Conference, "Strengthening the Bonds of Peace," 1994.
7. Ibid.
8. John Paul II, "Mulieris Dignitatem," 1988.
9. John Paul II, "Letter to Women," #3.
10. John Paul II, "Vita Consecrata" #57, 1996.
11. John Paul II, "On Fully fostering Women's Role in the Church," 1995.
12. "Strengthening the Bonds of Peace," 1994.
13. Vatican II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," #29.

Announcement

Mary Paulinus Oakes, R.S.M. (St. Louis) is the editor of a new publication of interest to archivists, historians and Institute members at large: *An Eyewitness Account of Civil War and Yellow Fever by a Sister of Mercy: A Primary Source by Sister Ignatius Sumner* (Baltimore, MD: Cathedral Foundation Press). The volume will appear in April, 1998. The cost will be around \$12.00. Distribution will be available from:

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August 1, 1997

Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh
1400 Locust Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-5166

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM
Editor, The MAST Journal
Sisters of Mercy
2300 Adeline Drive
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Dear Sr. Marie-Eloise,

We recently had the opportunity to read your editorial page from the Fall 1996 issue of MAST. Given your interest in the subject of partner and domestic violence, we want to make you aware of what others in the "Mercy system" are doing to address this most important issue.

The Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh has been fortunate to have an on-site victim advocate for the past four years supported by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Since February 1994, we have been screening all patients who are 18 years and older for domestic safety. Our on-site advocate has provided us with numerous support and educational materials to change the culture of our Emergency Department and Outpatient facilities so that we are screening nearly 90% of all patients who come through our doors who are female and over 18 years of age. We are proud to be a Mercy Hospital and to have been identified by the Family Violence Prevention Fund as one of the top ten hospital-based programs for domestic violence in the United States. This movement has been supported at the grass roots level by our physicians, nurses, social workers, and by our administrative staff.


Prior to our program's implementation, we identified only 1 % of the women who came to our emergency department as being victims of domestic violence. Now, we identify up to 20% of the women who come through our emergency department as victims and we are fortunate to be able to offer them services, counseling, safety planning, and referral, as well as emergency shelter. The program is administered in part through the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh and our relationship with our community on the Intimate Partner Abuse Coalition has helped to make us a leader in this area.

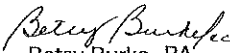
Providing universal screening and domestic violence services are now mandated by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations and they also fulfill our moral obligation as a Catholic institution holding itself out to the community as caring for the poor, under-served, and disenfranchised. Many of the victims we see in Emergency Departments are poor, non-white, marginalized populations, the very populations that Catherine McAuley came to this country to serve. To ignore this issue would be a disservice not only to our patients, but to the very heritage from which we have come.

Clearly, this work has helped us "walk the walk by living core Mercy values as named by the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System. Community (we are teaching and networking throughout Pittsburgh with the Allegheny County Health Department, Women's Center & Shelter, and others); Compassion (helping disempowered victims with more than just traditional medical interventions); Collaboration within Mercy Departments (Emergency Medicine, Nursing, OB/Gyn, Trauma, Psychiatry, Social Services, and Mercy Health Center, our outpatient clinic), and Stewardship (we have shown that victims of domestic violence use health care resources over twice as much as non-victims, and our advocacy intervention meaningfully impacts this utilization of resources). The positive implications of this program are self-evident not only to victims but to the community and payors alike.

Should you wish to have more information on our program, please do not hesitate to contact us at the numbers below.

Sincerely,


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Contributors

Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M. (Detroit) is a native of Independence, Iowa. She was a secondary school educator in Detroit and Michigan, a former vice-president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union (1984–1991), and past provincial administrator of the Sisters of Mercy in Detroit. She served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (1989–1992). She lectures often on religious life, leadership and charism of the Sisters of Mercy. Currently she is completing doctoral studies in women and religion at the University of Iowa, Iowa City.

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (Auburn) is the director of Marian Retreat Center in Auburn, California. She received her masters in education from the University of San Francisco and a masters in liturgical study from St. John's University, Collegeville. Katherine is a member of the leadership team of the Auburn regional community. Her research has focused on Mother Mary Baptist Russell. She serves on the editorial board of *The MAST Journal*.

Ellen Greeley, R.S.M. (St. Louis) holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and an M.A. in Music. She served for two terms on the St. Louis regional leadership team and was active in the Leadership Conference for Women Religious. She was a participant in the United Nations Non-Governmental Organization Women's Forum at the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995. She is presently in Mission Services with the St. Louis Sisters of Mercy Health System.

Patricia Hartigan, R.S.M. (Brooklyn) is the Institute justice coordinator. She earned a B.A. and M. A. in history, and holds a J.D. from the City University of New York at Queens College, an alternative law school for public advocacy and public policy. While in law school, she concentrated on environmental and international law. She maintains a small elder law practice. Her background includes fifteen years of teaching at the elementary, secondary, and college levels.

Mary Ellen Sheehan, I.H.M., holds an S.T.D., S.T.L., and S.T.B. from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, an M.A. from St. Louis University, and a B.A. from Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan. She is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, and director of the D.Min. programme, Toronto School of Theology, Toronto, Canada. She regularly lectures and offers workshops in Canada and the U.S.A. on feminist theology, women in theological education and practical ecclesiology.

Discussion Questions

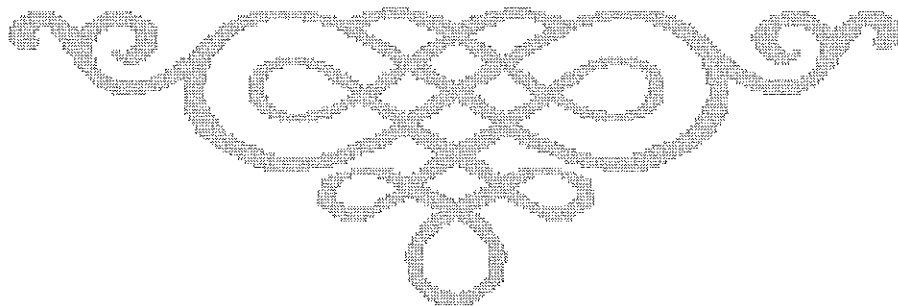
(Greeley) A 1994 *U.S. News and World Report* article said, "Much of the world is still waging war on women." What do you judge the best corporate response of women to this reality—going to battle, surrendering, declaring neutrality, or some other strategy?

(Burns) "We understand in the concept of spirituality an inner domain of meaning and an outer realm of activity." How do you explain that connection of "inner" and "outer" in your own words?

(Hartigan) In your own neighborhood, what is the evidence or the lack of evidence that the city, state or federal government is making its resources available to the poor?

(Sheehan) Which images of the post-Vatican II Church do you find are the ones that make the most sense to people you work with—new creation, living vine, Body of Christ, incarnational, eschatological, mystical, prophetic, mystery, communion, or sacrament?

(Doyle) What in your opinion is the greatest challenge for women in the church: claiming their dignity as women, having their gifts acknowledged, assuming a voice in governance and decision-making, confronting racism, or distinguishing cultural conditioning from "what is of God"?



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Want to Write: If you have an idea for an article, or you have a talk or article you would like published in *The MAST Journal*, please send the article or inquiry to Eloise Rosenblatt, R. S. M., MAST Office, Sisters of Mercy, 2300 Adeline Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010. Please include a complete return mailing address on all correspondence or contact her by e-mail at Eloise@gtu.edu.

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MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R. S. M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology, and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching, and administration; and to provide a means for members to address current issues within the context of their related disciplines.

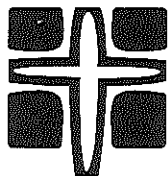
MAST has been meeting annually since then, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Julie Upton, R.S.M. currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST will hold its annual meeting in Ottawa, June 7-10, 1998.

Members work on a variety of task forces related to their scholarly discipline. Present task forces include: Scripture, healthcare ethics, and spirituality. In addition, the members seek to be of service to the institute by providing a forum for on-going theological education.

Membership dues are \$20 per year, payable to Marie Michele Donnely, R. S. M., MAST treasurer, Convent of Mercy, 515 Montgomery Ave., Merion Station, PA 19066.

If you would like to be on the mailing list, call or write: Julia Upton, R. S. M., executive director, St. John's University, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Jamaica, NY 11439 (718) 990-1861, or email to Uptonj@stjohns.edu.

Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have taken responsibility over the years to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R. S. M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R. S. M., currently serves in that capacity.



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