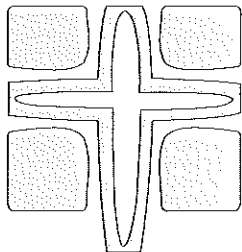


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Catherine McAuley A Cloak of Many Colors

**New York Regional Community 150th
Anniversary Celebration**

**The Prophetic Life and Work of Catherine
McAuley and the First Sisters of Mercy**

Mary Sullivan, R.S.M.

**Catherine McAuley: Strange Attractor in a
Quantum World**

Christian Koontz, R.S.M.

A Ministry to Ministers

Dr. Carol Breyer

Catherine McAuley and the Option for the Poor

Marilyn Sunderman, R.S.M.

**Catherine Seton and the New York Mercy
Experience**

Ann Miriam Gallagher, R.S.M.

Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M.

**Catherine McAuley: Going to the Threshold for
Mercy**

Neil Draves-Arpaia, M.Div.

Invitation to Resymbolize Our Lady of Mercy

Elizabeth McMillan, R.S.M.

Dear Sisters, Associates, Co-Workers, and Friends,

I read a description of the growing ranks of minority entrants into religious life in "A Portrait of Those Who Enter Religious Orders" by Gustav Niebuhr (*New York Times*, January 31, 1998). According to a United States Catholic Conference Survey, women candidates polled were mostly white, but 15 percent were Hispanic, 11 percent Asian and 3 percent African-American. Membership is going to be influenced by minorities who have, as a class, suffered oppression in American society. Are some attracted by the commitment of the Sisters of Mercy to work for equality of women in church and society?

A Sister of Mercy of Japanese ancestry in her late 70s remarked, when I was complaining about problems with community governance, "We are not powerless." Her counsel was all the more striking because her family had been incarcerated in civilian camps during WW II. She had known discrimination as a citizen, and marginalization as a nun because of her ethnicity.

What evidence will new members have that we are resisting injustice to women and minorities? American Catholics enjoy an advantage. To me, there is no better translation of biblical ideals of justice for the poor and oppressed than Title VII civil rights laws and anti-discrimination legislation developing since 1965. In their protection of the rights of workers, women, and minorities in the workplace, these laws are a prophetic challenge to some parish practices. Civil law is a better guarantee of fair employment policies in the church than ecclesial custom.

It's worth a long struggle to get religious women and clerics to comply with American law, and to measure their in-house, and intra-church policies by compliance with civil law governing such areas as due process, conflict of interest, discrimination, and contracts. This does not mean ending protection for religious institutions. It does mean resistance to the institutional practice of using religious or non-profit "exemption" as a license to bully women working in church-affiliated institutions, hiring and firing them at whim, then touting their authority under so-called "at will" contracts.

An "offer it up" spirituality doesn't advance justice for women. It is a fiction that vows abrogate women's civil rights. An education program would be timely, outlining the guarantees of our rights under both canon and civil law. If we are going to spend money on counseling, we should pay less to psychologists, and more to legal advisors. The damage done to us individually and collectively by unfairness in the workplace won't be redressed through private healing sessions with spiritual directors. It is appropriate for religious women to demand due process and redress, and to seek compensation for economic damage done to our congregations by the national epidemic of pastors firing nuns. We should mandate our leadership teams to advocate for us in the workplace, not leave us to face our ecclesially related troubles alone.

Why should a Hispanic, Asian or African-American woman join a community if she sees that its Caucasian members don't defend the rights of their own race? If Caucasian members want to attract women of color to join them in religious life, they should be ready to act side by side with them in their historical struggle for redress of wrongs, for equal protection, and for equal advantage. The equality we have not claimed for ourselves, we cannot hand on to anyone else. From this vantage point, some of the most powerful vocation ministers in the Institute are canon lawyers and civil lawyers. As they work to protect the rights of their clients, they assert on behalf of us all, "We are not powerless."



Sincerely,

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

The Prophetic Life and Work of Catherine McAuley and the First Sisters of Mercy

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M.

THE WORD "PROPHETIC" is often used in relation to religious life: as an exhortation, a complaint, a compliment, an assurance, a definition, a description. In fact, it is currently quite a fashionable word: for one can say that someone or something is "prophetic," one's theological vocabulary, at least, is not outmoded. I myself have used this word in the past as if it made no demands on my life, and as if something could be made "prophetic" simply by declaring that it was "prophetic." But today I am conscious of the superficiality of such talk, and of our need to explore more deeply the precise and thorough nature of the prophetic vocation.

I hope to show that the life and work of Catherine McAuley and the first Sisters of Mercy was indeed prophetic, in the truest biblical sense. But as I do so, I am aware that I will be holding up a contrasting mirror to my own life and work, and I may also be holding up a contrasting mirror to your life and work.

The Silver Ring

I would like to situate our reflections around the very plain but enduring symbol of Catherine's silver ring, the plain silver band which she re-

ceived at her profession of vows and which every Sister of Mercy since that day, and every Sister of Mercy in this room, has received. This ring is not a piece of ornamental jewelry, perhaps one among many; and it is not simply a

This silver ring is not a piece of
ornamental jewelry and it is not simply a
convenient tag or code-object. It is a
visible sign of the call to prophecy, a call
received, accepted, and lived.

convenient tag or code-object, worn to ward off potential suitors on subways or in supermarkets! This silver ring, if it is what it is meant to be, is a visible sign of the call to prophecy, a call received, accepted, and lived.

In the ceremonial for profession of vows that was used by the first Sisters of Mercy, and was printed in the ceremonial booklet Catherine adapted from that used by the Presentation Sisters, the bishop blesses the ring by sprinkling it with holy water and incensing it, but the words of blessing are not a liturgical formula of blessing, but a proclamation of the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel text reads in part:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole

world but forfeit their life?
Or what will they give in return for their life?

In Catherine's day, when the bishop, later in the ceremony, put the blessed ring on the third finger of the left hand of the newly professed sister, he said:

May Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who has now espoused you, protect you from all danger. Receive then the ring of faith, the seal of the Holy Spirit, that you may be called the Spouse of Christ, and if you are faithful, be crowned with him forever. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In Catherine's day, the professed sister then stood and said aloud, in Latin:

I am espoused to Him whom the angels serve, and at whose beauty the Sun and Moon stand in wonder.

After a further prayer of blessing, the newly professed sister then said aloud, still standing:

Regnum mundi, et omnem ornatum saeculi, contempsi, propter amorem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi.

[The kingdom of the world, and all the ornaments of the earth, I have set aside for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom I have seen, whom I have loved, in whom I have believed, and toward whom I incline.]

This speaking of, from, and for God is the very purpose of the profession of religious vows: this is the call and the response signified in the silver ring.

We may once have interpreted the “spousal” language in this ritual in too anthropomorphic a way, or worse, in too individualistic a way. We may now think that we have grown or should grow beyond such language and such interpretation. We may therefore be satisfied with the brief statement in our *Constitutions*:

In keeping with our Mercy tradition, we wear a silver ring, as a sign of consecration. (*Constitutions* 32)

But I would like to suggest that it is time for us to focus more intently on the meaning of the silver ring of our profession.

This silver ring, which is all we have retained of the visible attire of the first Sisters of Mercy, is not only a most important symbol of Catherine McAuley’s prophetic life and work, and that of the first Sisters of Mercy. For if we wear it truthfully, and if we accept the call and response it signifies, this ring can also be the most tangible daily symbol of our own corporate prophetic identity.

For the ring is intended to be a statement about an experience of God and about the consuming commitment that flows from that experience.

Therefore, this ring has more in common with the “live coal” that touched Isaiah’s mouth (Isa 6:6), and with the hand that touched Jeremiah’s mouth (Jer 1:9), and with the scroll Ezekiel was asked to eat (Ezek 3:1), than we have perhaps realized. The silver ring is a personal and communal identification; it is a mutual pledge between the wearer and the God to whom she put out her hand and to whose word she opened her mouth.

The empowering obligation of this ring is like Isaiah’s saying: “Here I am; send me!” (Isa 6:8); it is like the “burning fire” within Jeremiah (Jer 20:9); it is like Deborah’s chal-

lenging Barak to assemble forces to liberate the Israelites from the Canaanites (Judg 4:8–9); it is like the aged Anna’s speaking “about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:37–38). This ring is meant to declare—in a simple but visible way—the wearer’s public acceptance of a public responsibility to speak for God.

The Call to Prophecy

The biblical call to prophecy is not an invitation to say what is on one’s own mind. It is a call to a much more disciplined and self-effacing speech act. It is a call to submit to the purification of one’s mind and heart and lips so that one may *receive from God* the word to be uttered. And then it is a humbling, consuming call to *go where one is sent*, and there to *speak for God*—to utter aloud, before all the people, in speech and in action, the word of and from God.

This speaking of, from, and for God is the very purpose of the profession of religious vows: this is the call and the response signified in the silver ring of the Sisters of Mercy. And this is the biblical explanation of the prophetic life and work of Catherine McAuley and the first Sisters of Mercy: their surrender to the purification of their lips, and their proclamation of God’s word.

I would like to dwell on these two intimately related aspects of the life and work of Catherine and the first Sisters

of Mercy: 1) their constant and ever more deeply purifying realization that it was *God's* word and *God's* mercy and *God's* love and *God's* revelation that had seized their lives; and then 2) their consuming willingness to utter that word, that mercy, that God-love, publicly, in speech and in action, such that their public identity was precisely as speakers of, from, and for God's values and God's presence.

First, let us talk about their purifying, seizing experience of receiving the word of God into their lives.

It is so easy to walk around as Sisters of Mercy unseized by the call of God: preoccupied by the distracting or comfortable calls of the "world," very busy dressing our professional sycamore trees (Amos 7:14), not wanting to become a "laughingstock" (Jer 20:7), taking cover in our alleged youth or age or inability to be eloquent (Jer 1:7). It is so easy to lead a life, even as a Sister of Mercy, that does not make itself available to the live coal of God's call to prophecy. It is so easy to hunker down before God's revelation and not open our mouths to the transforming touch of God's word.

Catherine McAuley and the first Sisters of Mercy were not like this. Their whole conception of prayer and of spiritual reading was to make themselves deliberately available to the call of God; to place themselves docilely before the revealing, transforming presence of God's Spirit; to let

themselves be touched by and purified by God's word; to open themselves to the ever more fiery and demanding realization that they were called to be not just a nice group of women who did helpful things for other people, but rather a religious community who were seized by the presence and word of God.

Let me recall for you the scenes and sayings you know so well:

- from the very beginning, the community on Baggot Street prayed together several times a day, but always in the early morning and before they went to bed;
- at least in the beginning, Catherine herself rose earlier than the rest, so that she might pray alone, or with a few others, the Psalter of Jesus, a prayer which by its repetition of Jesus' name and by its content helped her to remain centered in the realization that it was God's work, not her own, in which she was engaged;
- the whole consciousness of the Baggot Street community was a readiness to hear God speak to them—an awareness that God had spoken to them and was, even now, speaking to them;
- there was in Catherine and in the first sisters a deep desire to be recollected, to be mindful, that they were acting from,

for, and because of the action of God;

- in the Rule she composed, Catherine said of the "Visitation of the Sick": the sisters shall pass through the streets "preserving recollection of mind and going forward as if they expected to meet their Divine Redeemer in each poor habitation" (Rule 3.6, in Sullivan, ed. 298);
- the community meditated every day on the scriptures, especially on the life and ministry of Jesus: they used Catherine's *Journal of Meditations for Every Day in the Year*, a highly respected volume of scripturally-based daily meditations originally composed in Latin in the seventeenth century;
- Catherine and the first Sisters of Mercy read from the lives of the saints every day; and in the lives of the saints they experienced the call of God in the inspiring example of other Christian lives;
- Catherine repeatedly urged the first Sisters of Mercy to contemplate the example of Jesus Christ and to seek to bear "some resemblance to Him, copying some of the lessons he has given us during His mortal life, particularly those of His passion" (Neumann, ed. 330);
- Catherine was so convinced that the physical

presence of a Sister of Mercy should be, for others, a presence of God, that Mary Vincent Harnett says:

her desire to resemble our Blessed Lord...was her daily resolution, and the lesson she constantly repeated. "Be always striving," she would say, "to make yourselves like your Heavenly Spouse; you should try to resemble Him in some one thing at least, so that any person who sees you may be reminded of His holy life on earth." (Limerick Manuscript, in Sullivan, ed. 181)

- Catherine and the first Sisters of Mercy embraced silence, not in an oppressive way, but as, as she said, "the faithful guardian of interior recollection," as a help to interior reflection on who one was before God and what one was about on God's behalf (Rule 8.1, in Sullivan, ed. 303);
- they treasured what they called "mental prayer," as a means that God would use "to imprint deeply on the mind the sublime truths of religion, to elevate the soul, and enflame the heart with the love of God and of Heavenly things" (Rule 11.2, in Sullivan, ed. 306);
- they suffered in their own personal and communal lives—in countless, constant ways: poverty, hunger, illness, heavy work, numerous deaths—but they consciously chose to

receive that suffering as the Cross of Christ, to let the continuing redemptive work of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ enter their own lives as the revealing call of God;

- and in 1841 Catherine herself said of her Lenten reflections:

The impression made on our minds by forty days meditation on Christ's humiliations, meekness, and unwearied perseverance will help us on every difficult occasion, and we will endeavour to make Him the only return He demands of us, by giving Him our whole heart, fashioned on His own model—pure, meek, merciful and humble. (Neumann, ed. 333–34)

What I am trying to say, by accumulated references to the earliest documentary sources, is that Catherine McAuley and our first sisters in Mercy conceived of themselves and defined themselves as women addressed by the voice of God, and they allowed themselves to be so addressed. They did not use the word "prophetic" to describe the purifying call they felt in their lives, but that is the biblical name for what they allowed themselves to experience and for what Jeremiah experienced:

Then I said: "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy [or a nineteen-year-old girl, or a fifty-two year old woman]." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say 'I am only [this or that]' . . . for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I

command you . . ." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms . . . stand up and tell them every thing that I command you." (Jer 1:6–10, 17)

The Prophetic Mission

To speak as a prophet is, as the Hebrew prophets understood and as Jesus himself demonstrated, to speak of, for, and from God. It is to declare, in one's human words or deeds, the will and revelation of God. To speak of, for, and from God does not require that one use the word "God" every time one opens one's mouth, but it does require that one's words and actions witness to God's revelation, that they announce God's true character, attitude, relationship, and action with respect to human life.

If we study the life and work of Catherine McAuley and the first Sisters of Mercy we cannot fail to be struck by the "of God" character of their utterance—I mean, the utterance of their whole lives, the public expression of God which their lives declared, whether in words or in deeds. But before we look at their lives in detail there is one other characteristic of true prophets that we see in Catherine and the first sisters: absolute dependence on the help and virtue of God.

The true prophetic mission appears and is overwhelming. To accomplish

what God asks, to go where one is sent, and to speak what one is asked to speak, is always beyond the prophet's own personal capacities and virtues; the true prophet always knows that he or she is in radical need of God's help and presence, if his or her prophetic utterance is to be truly "of God."

So the most prominent prophetic qualification of Catherine McAuley was her profound humility and purity of heart (Clare Moore even spoke of Catherine's "self-contempt" [Sullivan, ed. 93]), but the first Sisters of Mercy also grew into such humility and purity. Certainly they were from the beginning conscious of their youth, their lack of know-how, their timidity, their lack of public skills, their inexperience before the world and before the Gospel, their lack of any sort of personal authority, and the fragility and sickness of their community. Added to all these weaknesses were the social and ecclesiastical incapacities attributed to their gender. Naïve as the first Baggot Street community were about some things, they were not unaware that their parish priest "had [as Clare Augustine Moore recognized] no great idea that the unlearned sex could do anything but mischief by trying to assist the clergy" (Dublin Manuscript, in Sullivan, ed. 208).

Yet Catherine McAuley and these very ordinary women, who had initially no special genius of their own,

were willing to open their minds and hearts and lives to the live coal of God's call to live and speak prophetically—to be publicly seen as women of, for, and from God. And the early history of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and England is filled with their prophetic deeds and utterances.

We see in all these deeds and utterances some of the

- her defense of the sacramental needs and rights of the servant girls and women in the House of Mercy, against the inadequate arrangements conceded by Rev. Walter Meyler, the parish priest and a close friend of the archbishop; and her offering to him, in vain, a greater annual salary for these sacramental services

The outstanding prophetic qualification of Catherine McAuley was her profound humility and purity of heart.

classic forms of prophetic speech on behalf of God: the promise, the reproach, the admonition, and occasionally the threat. For example:

- Catherine's own decision to give up her entire inheritance and all her future personal security to build a House of Mercy for poor women and children because Jesus had said: "Whatever you do to the least of these who are mine you do to me" (Matt 25:40);
- her declaring God's regard for the precious human life and the blessed eternal life of those dying of cholera by the way she cared for them, knelt by their cots, prayed with them, protected them from premature burial, and consoled them with assurances of God's love;

than she could ever afford—all because she sought the power of the Risen and Eucharistic Christ in the fragile lives of homeless girls;

- her daring to walk with her sisters, as middle-class women, into and through Dublin's worse slum districts, and to visit hovels where the poorest of the poor were sick and dying, so that she might tell them of the love and mercy of God;
- her going through miles of snow and mud in Birr in order to visit families long estranged from the church and to explain to them chapter 13 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians;
- and all the dignity and self-effacement of Catherine's

last year of life, a year of her own increasing illness and debility, during which she established two new foundations and prepared for a third, all the while teaching her sisters to bestow themselves "most freely" and to rely "with unhesitating confidence on the Providence of God" (Neumann, ed. 353).

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Whether one looks at the beatitudes, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, or the account of the last judgment in the Gospel of Matthew, one sees, in Catherine's own life and in the lasting effect of her work, all that one could hope to see of prophetic utterance from, for, and of God. One can see why, on her death, her good friend Bishop Michael Blake said of her:

A more zealous, a more prudent, a more useful, a more disinterested, a more successful benefactress of human nature, I believe, never existed in Ireland since the days of St. Bridget. (Bermondsey Annals, in Sullivan, ed. 125)

(That is a span of 1300 years!)

But what of Catherine's first associates—and the earliest Sisters of Mercy? What of

their vocation to speak of, for, and from God?

The time is long past when we can do them justice. Despite their goodness in writing detailed Annals, when they were just as busy as we are, and despite the insights available in their archives, the full prophetic lives of these women are mostly hidden from us. We can catch only glimpses of their prophetic

declarations of the mercy of God:

- Mary Vincent Harnett compiling a *Catechism of Scripture History* that was eventually used in Mercy schools throughout Ireland—probably the first such scripture textbook for Irish Catholic children;
- Mary Ann Doyle repeatedly begging the Bishop of Meath, unsuccessfully, to allow the sisters to visit the patients in the fever hospitals in Tullamore during an epidemic of typhoid;
- Frances Warde choosing to go to serve in the United States when she realized that her words and work in Carlow would never be understood by

Bishop Haly of Kildare and Leighlin;

- Mary Clare Moore, Mary Francis Bridgeman, and twenty-one other Sisters of Mercy going, on very short notice, to Turkey and the Crimea to nurse wounded and dying soldiers during the Crimean War—and living there in barracks and tent huts, with unbelievably harrowing privations, illnesses, and squalor;
- Mary Winifred Sprey dying of cholera and Mary Elizabeth Butler dying of typhus—among sick and wounded soldiers in the Crimea to whom they had shown the tender face of God;
- Mary Gonzaga Barrie, Mary Stanislaus Jones, and other sisters struggling for over two years with Archbishop Henry Manning to keep open the hospital they had founded for incurable sick poor on Great Ormond Street in London;
- Mary Clare Moore corresponding with Florence Nightingale for almost twenty years, until Clare's death, and sending her books of spiritual reading which Florence treasured: works by Gertrude the Great, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross.

This list does not even begin to tell the story of our foremothers in Mercy. But of one thing

I am sure, from all the evidence I have seen:

in the letters these women wrote to those they served,
in the places where they chose to live,
in their visits to the sick and dying and imprisoned,
in the classrooms where they taught,
in the adult instruction they gave,
in the hospitals where they nursed,
in their conversations with dying bishops and homeless orphans,
in their public appearance and in the example of their lives,

these women of Mercy explicitly spoke *of, from, and for* God.

They used God's name and spoke aloud of the God they understood. They were not timid about explaining God's love for humankind; they were not reluctant to name the great mysteries of Jesus' redemptive life; they were not afraid to declare publicly their own faith and hope in God, and their own confidence in the loving, active presence of God's Spirit in the world. Their voices did not melt into the secular woodwork. They knew the explicit meaning and the prophetic vocation of their silver ring.

Catherine McAuley's Silver Ring

The biblical precedent for our silver ring is not a wedding ring, but a signet ring. In the Old Testament, the finger ring was almost always a ring engraved with a seal. The seal was used to mark the personal

authority vested in the wearer of the ring or to give personal authority to a document. The ring with its seal served as a signature and a pledge. It was vital to the authenticity of the seal that the clarity of its engraved image be preserved, and that the seal be kept on the person at all times.

When Catherine McAuley died, her silver ring was taken from her finger and subsequently given to Mary Juliana

done); and on the outside, the words, "*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*" (To the greater glory of God). I think these mottoes describe well her interior response to God's call to prophecy and her public prophetic work—her utterances of, from, and for God. These mottoes speak of the interior purification of her desire and of the greater revelation of God's mercy to which she gave her life.

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(Ellen) Delany when she professed her vows. Juliana eventually served in the Belfast community, and Catherine McAuley's silver ring is now preserved there. At a gathering of Irish archivists on Baggot Street last June, those of us who were present had the privilege of holding and putting on Catherine's ring. For each of us that silent encounter with Catherine's ring was full of meaning. We put our own silver rings back on with much deeper understanding of what they mean and what they oblige.

Catherine's silver ring has two mottoes engraved in it: on the inside, Mary's words, "*Fiat voluntas tua*" (Thy will be

We don't have Catherine's own ring here today. Her silver ring cannot be our ring. Her historical times are not our times, and she cannot live our prophetic vocation for us. But we can find in the example of her life the inspiration to take our own silver rings seriously, not simply as the record of a past event, but as the engraved seal and sign of a present reality and a present obligation.

In the ring of each of us is an engraved motto—one we chose "in our youth," when we perhaps little realized the full call of the live coal of God's word in our lives. It is perhaps time for us to examine those mottoes, those seals of God

upon our lives. If these motto-words are still the voice of God for us, then let us live them. If these motto-words are no longer the language that most urgently expresses the empowering call of God in our lives, then let us re-engrave our rings with the purifying words of the voice calling us to prophecy.

Those who collaborate with us—as associates, co-workers, and followers of Catherine McAuley—are also joined to the pledge and meaning of these rings, in whatever ways they hear their own calls to prophesy God's Mercy. They join the company of dozens of lay women and men without whose help the Sisters of Mercy would never have been founded, and without whose continuing companionship the prophecy to which the community of Mercy is called will not be widely and visibly proclaimed.

Has the prophetic call of our silver ring
been somewhat hidden
from public view?

Has the visible seal of God's claim upon
our lives been somewhat blurred?

What I have most wanted to stress in these reflections on the prophetic life and work of Catherine McAuley and the first Sisters of Mercy is the visible, audible *of, from, and for* God character of their prophetic voice. They moved through this world and were

known in this world as women *of* God, women acting *from* God's desire, women speaking *for* God and *for* God's mercy.

And they understood themselves in that way:

- as messengers of God's consolation,
- as bringers of God's comfort,
- as defenders of God's poor,
- as proclaimers of God's realm,
- as teachers of God's word,
- as nurses of God's healing,
- as a human house of God's Mercy.

When Catherine made new dresses for two hundred very poor little girls in Bermondsey; when she rejoiced to think of all the bazaar money in Limerick that would be changed into "bread and broth and blankets" for the poor (Neumann, ed. 275);

and income—in all these ordinary events of her life she sought to speak publicly of and for God and to nurture a visible prophetic community who by their words and deeds declared the revelation of God.

Reinvigoration

In speaking of the wonderful reinvigoration of Mary Aloysius Scott's life, once she went to Birr as superior of the new foundation, Catherine said of Mary Aloysius's former behavior: "We put our candles under a bushel" (Neumann, ed. 291).

Even now, Catherine does not want us to put our light under a bushel—as undemanding and unfatiguing as that might be—but rather to "let our light shine before others, so that they may see the good works of God and give glory to our God in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

We perhaps have to ask ourselves whether our light has been, to some extent, under a bushel in recent years—our personal and corporate prophetic light. Has the prophetic call of our silver ring been somewhat hidden from public view? Has the visible seal of God's claim upon our lives been somewhat blurred? Has our prophetic utterance been somewhat inaudible?

In June 1841, Bishop John England visited Baggot Street, hoping to recruit a community of Sisters of Mercy for a foundation in Charleston, South Carolina. Although

when she grieved the deaths of three sisters in twelve days in 1840—in Dublin, Cork, and Limerick; when she struggled mightily to create a commercial laundry on Baggot Street, so that the girls and women in the House of Mercy would have a source of employment

Catherine could not spare any sisters at this time, she enlisted the smallest postulant in the community to play a joke on the bishop, and then described the fun in a letter to Mary Aloysius Scott:

After breakfast we assembled all the troops in the community room from all quarters—Laundry, Dining Hall, etc., etc. By chance 2 were in from Kingstown—we made a great muster. The question was put by his Lordship from the Chair: “Who will come to Charleston with me to act as Superior?” The only one who came forward offering to fill the office was Sr. Margaret Teresa Dwyer which afforded great laughing. I had arranged it with her before,

but did not think she would have courage. His Lordship was obliged to acknowledge that we are poor dependents on the white veil and caps. We certainly look like a community that wanted time to come to maturity, reduced to infancy again as we are. (Neumann, ed. 347)

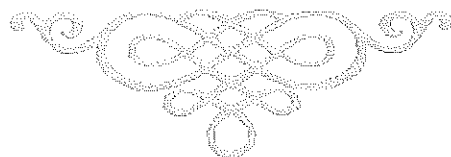
In the rhythm of the history of our prophetic call as Sisters of Mercy we are perhaps, once again, “reduced to infancy” and wanting “time to come to maturity.” May the God of all true utterance touch the lips of all of us with the live coal of the words and deeds God wishes us to utter.



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Ann Marie Caron, R.S.M. (New York) compiled and most helpfully edited this issue of *The MAST Journal*. It includes several of the papers presented at the conference “Catherine McAuley: A Cloak of Many Colors: The New York Regional Community 150th Anniversary Celebration” held at Our Lady of Victory Academy, Dobbs Ferry, New York, September 19–20, 1997. Ann Marie Caron holds a Ph.D. in theology from Drew University, and is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Pastoral Ministry at St. Joseph College, West Hartford, CT.



Catherine McAuley

A Strange Attractor in a Quantum World

Christian Koontz, R.S.M.

IN THE QUIET BEFORE writing, I see an image of Catherine McAuley swimming gracefully through the turbulent, sometimes treacherous, waters of mid-nineteenth-century Ireland. Her strokes are strong as she bends her head to plunge deeper. Attracted by her grace, strength, and courage, other swimmers quickly join her. Strengthening and encouraging one another, the school of swimmers makes its way farther and deeper into the waters, attracting still others as it goes.

Before long, the swimmers find themselves in a place where the light blue water before them turns suddenly dark. They swim toward

with a more diverse multitude of creatures than they have ever seen before, each one unique and intriguing. Such abundance. Such beauty. As they gaze, awe transfigures them. This is where they want to be. Here they are alive. Here is where they decide to stay. They have reached the edge of chaos.¹

In complexity science, the edge of chaos has become an icon for the creativity immanent in complex adaptive systems. In human systems such as the Sisters of Mercy, this edge constitutes a fluid and fertile matrix, the source of all creative ideas, projects, artworks, and actions. Poets and prophets, mystics and saints

below the level of our conscious awareness. We cannot demand that these images reveal themselves to us. Nor can we manufacture them or make them up. What we can do is to cultivate within ourselves and within our communities that atmosphere of depth and those attitudes of openness, honesty, and reverence most receptive to them.

As we have often experienced, when we let go control of our thoughts and feelings, we find ourselves dropping into a state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleep. In this place, the edge of chaos within us, those images that we are ready, willing, and able to receive will appear. These pre-verbal images may manifest themselves through memories, feelings, hunches, and intuitions, as well as visual and auditory images. In this fringe of conscious awareness, we are awake, so we are able to make note of these images. But we are not keyed into controlling them. Rather, we are simply relaxed and free and open to them.

Whether we recognize them or not, these images are the seeds of our imagination. Whether we honor them or not, these images give rise to our questions, the seeds of our intelligence. Whether we work

In complexity science,
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this dramatic line dividing light from dark. Curious, a bit frightened, they peer over the edge to see an inclined plane gradually descending into greater and greater darkness. As their sight adjusts to the deepening shadows, they notice that the slope is teeming

are most at home here. To this teeming edge, poised between chaos and frigidity, is perhaps where evolution is again beckoning the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

Fundamentally, matter evolves through images.² Images are in constant motion

with them or not, these images work their magic by motivating our words and actions. They hold the key to our future.

To the extent that we recognize, honor, and work with them appropriately, these images can provide us with the two things we most need to become the persons we are capable of becoming and doing the things we are capable of doing, as individuals and as Sisters of Mercy: spiritual energy and clarity of vision. Surely it was Catherine's spiritual energy and clarity of vision that made her such a powerful strange attractor in nineteenth-century Ireland.

We have often experienced that energy and vision in the past. Perhaps today we can gain greater access to Catherine's energy and vision by dwelling in some of her images, as these can be refreshed and enlightened through the evocative images and language of the new sciences, especially quantum physics and complexity science.

In a letter to Sister M. de Sales in December of 1840, Catherine spoke of her life as being like a dance called "Right and Left." Over a hundred years later, that image motivated the Gathering of Artists in Belmont, North Carolina and guided the Grand Right and Left, a traveling art show weaving Sisters of Mercy from around the country together in dynamic new ways. This image of the dance continues to motivate

and guide many of us today, but we can see it afresh through the lens of quantum physics which holds that reality is a network of relationships.

As the dancers move, together they create a dynamic, ever-changing pattern of relationships. While scientists once believed that understanding the properties of the parts would yield an understanding of the whole, quantum physics reveals that, in re-

While scientists once believed that understanding the properties of the parts would yield an understanding of the whole, quantum physics reveals that, in reality, apart from the whole there are no parts.

ality, apart from the whole there are no parts: the dance gives rise to the dancers. Yet without the parts there can be no whole: the dancers create the dance. "As we move into the new millennium," Marion Woodman points out, "we are dancing deep in the flames—physical and psychic." Through the flames, "Sophia calls to us as she has called through the centuries."³ We Sisters of Mercy need not fear dancing in the flames because we dance with Catherine's wisdom flowing through our veins.

The image of Catherine wrapping a sick child in her cloak to carry the child home motivated this conference,

"Catherine McAuley: A Cloak of Many Colors," exploring "The New York Experience: A Contemporary View of the Vision of Catherine McAuley." That image guided conference organizers in their choice of presentations and also attracted many of us to participate in the conference. The image of Catherine's silver ring gave rise to Mary Sullivan's inspirational address and set the tone for the second day of the conference.

The images of the dance, the cloak, and the ring will no doubt continue to motivate and guide many of us in the days ahead. But there are several others that may still touch and move us. In a brief epilogue to *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, Mary Sullivan draws our attention to the importance of images as "Indirect revelations of something deeper" in Catherine's character. She then chooses to "dwell briefly" on four images that emerged from her long immersion in the primary documents significant in the history of the Sisters of Mercy: fire, Catherine's homemade boots, her blessed candle, and her memory of "dejected

faces.”⁴ Perhaps viewing these four images through the lens of quantum physics can rekindle their energy in our own lives and cast new light on where we are as Sisters of Mercy and where we are trying to go.

to a packet of energy and evokes the image of a quantum leap, which requires a build-up of tremendous energy. Our world is a constant and dynamic interplay of energy patterns. Perhaps one of the first associations from the

ward God who stood before her in death. Like Moses who removed his sandals before the burning bush (Exod 3:5), and Joshua who put off his sandals before the messenger of God (Josh 5:15), Catherine McAuley deliberately and reverently entered the holy encounter of her death.⁶

Life wants to discover itself. Individuals explore possibilities and systems emerge.

The image of fire has re-emerged in recent years as one of our most compelling images, as we saw in the Second Institute Chapter and, more recently, in the Institute Education Congress held in Scranton, Pennsylvania in July: “Tending the Fire in the New Millennium.” Fire was clearly a compelling image for Catherine. She made deliberate reference to Jesus’ claiming that he came to “cast fire upon the earth.” Catherine saw herself as kindling for that fire and referred to postulants as being some of the fire Christ cast on the earth.⁵ In Teilhard de Chardin’s familiar vision, after humans have mastered winds, waves, and tides, a day will dawn when we harness the energies of love. On that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.

Quantum physicists look at everything in the universe, including matter, as energy. The very word *quantum* refers

quantum world associated with fire is energy. Energy creates, destroys, transforms, and consumes.

A second image possessing great power for Catherine was that of homemade boots. The year before she died, the community at Baggot Street undertook a project especially dear to her heart—making cloth boots. Inexpensive, warm, and sturdy, they were reinforced with leather. At about two in the morning of the day of her death, Catherine asked a sister for paper and twine, tied up her boots, and asked that the package be burned until it was completely consumed. As Sullivan reflects:

This simple gesture of quietly burning her boots in the middle of the night stands as a remarkable symbol of Catherine’s final abandonment of herself to the providence of God. In this act of self-surrender she accepted the end of her walking, she relinquished her historical work as a Sister of Mercy, and she turned barefoot to-

Perhaps no other image is more evocative of the essence of Catherine and her “walking nuns” than these boots. Simple, homemade, and sturdy, these boots were made for walking. It was in the walking that Catherine and her companions became who they were. It was in the walking that they ministered to others. Like the poet Theodore Roethke in “The Waking,” they learned by going where they had to go.

“Life wants to discover itself,” Margaret Wheatley reminds us. “Individuals explore possibilities and systems emerge. They self-transcend into new forms of being. Newness appears out of nowhere. We can never predict what will emerge. We can never go back. Life is on a one-way street to novelty.”⁷ Catherine and her sisters simply put one foot in front of the other, and the Sisters of Mercy emerged out of the chaos.

Catherine further expressed her abandonment to God just hours before her death by reaching for the blessed candle, an ancient symbol of the risen Christ. As recorded in the Limerick Manuscript, she had exhorted her sisters to let their lives burn noiselessly, like a pure

candle: "How silently and brilliantly the lamp in the sanctuary burns . . . when the oil is pure and good; it is only when it is otherwise that it twinkles and makes noise."⁸

Carefully observed, a burning candle becomes emblematic of the wave/particle duality, which constitutes quantum physics' most revolutionary understanding of the nature of matter. Light is both a particle and a wave. It all depends on how we look at it. The flame of the candle can represent the particle aspect of reality and the rays of light emanating from the flame represent the wave aspect. Seen in this light, the flame of a candle symbolizes us as individual persons who stand in our own right, but also as members of a community whose light intermingles and intersects as it stretches to the farthest reaches of the universe.

In quantum physics, notes Danah Zohar, "both waves and particles are equally fundamental. Each is a way that matter can manifest itself, and both together are what matter is. And while neither 'state' is complete in itself, and both are necessary to give us a complete picture of reality, it turns out that we can never focus on both at once."⁹ In holding the blessed candle in her last moments, perhaps Catherine was gathering both herself and her community into the one flame of Christ.

The fourth image that Sullivan reflects on is the image of the dejected faces of

persons who were poor. Their faces haunted Catherine. In a letter to Catherine Meagher about Dublin's widespread unemployment in November, 1840, she wrote of two young women whom she had seen the day before: "Their dejected faces have been before me ever since."¹⁰

Quantum physics offers an especially evocative lens for viewing this image of the de-

jected faces afresh. That lens is participation. An emergent world demands our participation. We are made to participate in life, to participate in the co-creation of the world. Participation is both our birth-right and our responsibility. In a participative world, there is no place for either coercion or mere conformity. There is only the freedom of equal partners in the enterprise of life. There are no bosses, only partners, as Margaret Wheatley reminds us.¹¹ All beings have an equal right to be here, and all beings have an equal right to participate in determining what the here will be. What does it mean to participate? That is the question.

Organizational theorists today are being influenced by the growing awareness of the paradigm shift now occurring

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from a clockwork worldview to a quantum worldview. Participation has become an organizational buzzword. The ever-present demand of large organizations for "strategic plans" calls for the participation of everyone involved in the enterprise. Grant funds are awarded to those who partner, who can demonstrate that everyone in a given organization has participated in

the planning of the project. But what does it really mean to participate? Perhaps the omnipresence of dejected faces in our culture signals our massive personal and collective failure to allow and arrange for and encourage and accept and establish the optimum conditions where all can genuinely participate.

If you, my reader, have read this far, I invite you now to participate further in Catherine's five images sketched here: the dance, the fire, the homemade boots, the candle, and the dejected faces. Take some time to play with these images, in whatever form or media appeal to you. See how the images interact with one another, enlighten and influence one another. Be present to them and let them be present to you. Savor them,

touch them, taste them, attend to whatever pictures, memories, and associations they evoke in you. Be free to let Catherine's images evoke others. Let her images and yours play together and see what happens.

Then pay attention to the one image that most stands out to you and focus on it.

Embodying these images, each of us
alone and together can become strange
attractors drawing order out of chaos.

Turn the lens of your awareness on that one image. Taste it, touch it, smell it. Be with it, evoke it. Do not try to figure it out. Forego the temptation to interpret it literally because literal interpretation can distort and even kill it. Simply experience it. Be in it, and let it be in you. Free associate with it. Allow yourself to feel its meaning. Move with the image, intellectually, imaginatively, and emotionally. Draw, paint, dance, sing, or play

whatever comes to you. Become the image, and let the image become you.

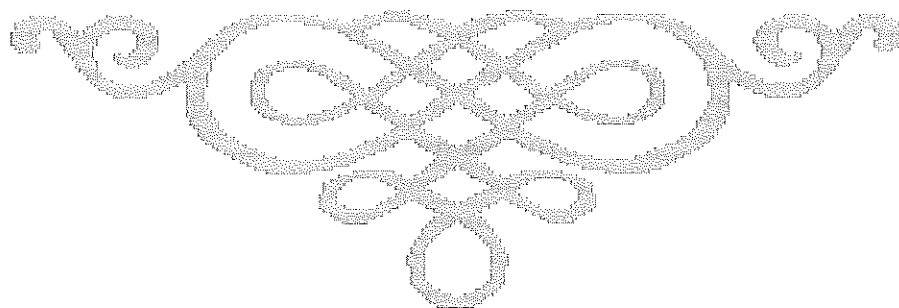
In other words, embody the image. If we embody an image, it becomes part of our cells, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. Our cells do not forget such images. They flow in our veins. Through those images of Catherine's that still

have power to touch and move us, Catherine lives through us. Embodying these images, each of us alone and together can become strange attractors drawing order out of the chaos of the end of the twentieth century. Let us plunge into the Mystery and swim together into the new millennium.



Notes

1. This image was inspired by Chris Langton, one of the creators of complexity science. He describes an experience of scuba diving on the continental shelf off the coast of Puerto Rico in Roger Lewin, *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 187.
2. Fred Alan Wolf, *The Dreaming Universe: A Mind-Expanding Journey into the Realm Where Psyche and Physics Meet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 16.
3. Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson, *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Consciousness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 11.
4. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).
5. Sullivan, 329.
6. Sullivan, 333.
7. Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, *A Simpler Way* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1996), 66.
8. Sullivan, 333.
9. *The Quantum Self: Human Nature and Consciousness Defined by the New Physics* (New York: Quill, 1990), 26.
10. Sullivan, 330.
11. Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1994), 11.



A Ministry to Ministers

Carol Ann Breyer

A FEW YEARS AGO, when I addressed the graduates of the Class of 1964 from Mercy High School in Baltimore, I was asked to name my greatest accomplishment in the last thirty years.

Without hesitation, I responded, "Marrying a priest, and working toward a married priesthood." Since then, I have pondered over and over again exactly what that meant, even though the spontaneity of my reply did not surprise me. The pain and the privilege of my life choices are ever with me in ways that none of us dreamed of in the late 1960s when we thought that optional celibacy would readily follow the change to vernacular liturgies and the abandonment of starch, serge, and fish on Friday. How wrong we were to underestimate the forces of power and patriarchy that continue to affect every Roman Catholic woman to this day. And mandatory celibacy for priests is really about women and their second class citizenship in the Church.

The universality of the inequality issue exploded in my consciousness as never before when I read in Angela Bolster's book, *Catherine McAuley Venerable for Mercy*, the account of her clash with clerical authority. Bolster reports: "Mounting opposition

(was) spearheaded by Rev. Matthias Kelly of St. Andrew's, who, according to sources, did not believe 'that the unlearned sex could do anything but mischief by trying to assist the clergy . . .' He was prejudiced against the Foundress whom he considered a parvenu."

And those of us involved in movements now as

their vocation to serve God and God's people never included a vow of celibacy. And they leave rather than compromise their position.

But the institution has treated them shamefully. Abandoned by a Church they love, they have suffered poverty, indignity, and exclusion. Years ago, married priests struggled for jobs often as

Mandatory celibacy for priests is really about women and their second class citizenship in the Church.

"un-Catholic" as Catherine McAuley's project was regarded then forge new bonds with the heroic woman who, like many of us will do more than a hundred and fifty years later, spanned two centuries of conflict.

In her day, she reached out with boldness and compassion to the poor and deprived, and sought to establish the congregation of Mercy only for that purpose. In our own time, many of us extend our hearts and hands to those whom the system has at best rejected, and at worst ostracized—priests who marry, stating with their lives that

lowly as pumping gas, and even today, there is an enormous struggle of resigned priests to receive the pensions they earned during their years of service as canonical priests. In many dioceses across the country, priests who left were blackballed in the job market. It is true that such harshness has modified in recent years, but even in the best of circumstances, some stigma persists, and scars often remain.

At the same time, the appropriateness of married priesthood is rapidly becoming a non-issue since the Roman Catholic Church welcomes to service as active

priests converted Protestant clergymen with their wives and children. Likewise, in an effort to stave off the priest shortage, a growing number of married males are being ordained as deacons. But the discrimination against women continues through the policy that frowns at the idea of remarriage after orders.

In an era where family values are all but incorporated in a new Pledge of Allegiance supported by all denominations, Church authority still has difficulty with the equality of Matrimony and Holy Orders in the sacramental system. Is this not further evidence of the gender problem which exists in the Church when the greatest punishment is reserved for those who witness to the compatibility of Holy Orders and Matrimony after ordination?

The movement for optional celibacy in the priesthood is clearly about much more than allowing priests to marry. It strikes at the heart of clerical superiority and gender exclusivity. And as a "women's issue," women need to respond.

The movement for optional celibacy in the priesthood is clearly about much more than allowing priests to marry. It strikes at the heart of clerical superiority and gender exclusivity. And as a "women's issue," women need to respond.

Although it would not have been possible for Catherine McAuley to anticipate the injustice of the Church toward its own, the concern she evidenced for the oppressed people she served is still relevant. Making the application of Catherine's message to the present time, Carmel Bourke in *A Woman Sings of Mercy* concludes: "We too must bring the touch of Jesus as we minister his mercy to the poor, the forgotten, the marginalized in today's broken world."

Such a ministry may seem an oddity, yet its lack of orthodoxy does not in the least detract from its authenticity. Catherine McAuley recognized and responded wherever there was need. The situation of the married priest is one of estrangement from all he has known and cherished during his years of for-

ministry and abandon formal religion.

In her address to women religious who also at times feel themselves distanced from the institutional Church, Sr. Doris Gottemoeller, President of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, in an address to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in 1994, warned against that reaction, stating: "To allow ourselves to be alienated from the Church is to surrender our birthright; it is to deprive ourselves of life-giving nourishment; it is to be exiled from our true home. Furthermore, public estrangement from the Church deprives its other members of the witness of our love, our truth, and our fidelity."

Her words ring equally true for the married priest who is disallowed from exercising the role for which he has been educated and trained, often for all of his adolescent and adult life. The loss to the Church of these resources is lamentable, as Richard Schoenherr, himself a married priest, noted with dismay in his thoughtful account *Full Pews, Empty Altars*. But the subject here is the plight of the married priest who, denied his faculties, is forced to retool his life and calling.

It is to these modern "Shepherds in the Mist" that we must direct our attention. Even when we may disagree with their choices, we owe them affirmation and respect, support and encouragement, and opportunities to use their

mation. An enormous sense of disenfranchisement marks his existence which is truly an exile tempting many to turn from the Church and seek other refuges for priestly functions. Still others lose interest altogether in exercising their

talents and draw from their background.

For example, there's a Franciscan in South Florida who wrestles with the emptiness of his life and his attraction to a potential female companion. He needs to assess his situation, not just in the solitude of a retreat setting, but in the living room of a married priest in his area who welcomes the chance to counsel and advise his fellow priest. Someone needs to be there to connect them, to forge the link that males find so difficult, but which is so crucial to psychological and spiritual health.

And there is the parish priest in Alabama who with his young wife must start a new existence. He requires the reassurance of a small faith community where he is acknowledged and accepted. And someone needs to be there to identify a nearby group and, most of all, to extend to him an invitation to come and see.

A deacon who married in South Carolina misses desperately the intellectual stimulation he once shared with fledgling and ordained clergy. He still reads voraciously, and is anxious to communicate. And someone needs to be there who understands his condition and can involve him with others like him to exchange books, reviews, and comments.

The married missionary who opens a small retreat center in Georgia wants it to serve others seeking solace and renewal. He promotes it as best

he can and hopes the word will spread. And someone needs to be there who will come and bring companions for the journey, thus reinforcing the concept and affirming the ideal.

A married priest approaching his 75th year recently wrote to his pastor: "You and I gratefully share faith in God's love for each of His other children. We consciously witness His providence every day. My formal dispensation to marry in 1973

came our ministry in the true spirit of mercy. As members of the Church in good standing, religious sisters can offer more than can be attained otherwise. From you can come the recognition of the priestly identity and its gifts for God's people. Through your respect, you can extend encouragement and hope. And, most of all, you can utilize the potential of married priests.

Consider calling upon a married priest to anoint the

Through your respect,
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may have denied permission to celebrate Mass publicly, but it did not take away this more important duty of my Holy Orders: that of sharing this faith and love, respecting each one's uniqueness."

In many ways, what is been described here represents the mission of CORPUS which exists not only to secure acceptance of a married priesthood, but also to serve as a network of contacts and reinforcements for those outside the canonical ministry. With a membership of over fifteen hundred, CORPUS brings to the next century the vision of a priesthood of equals within the people of God.

And what has been to date "my" ministry needs to be-

dying when the regular chaplain is unavailable, or time is of the essence in an emergency room. Bob Scanlan, a married priest in Illinois, carries a beeper after hours to respond to the critical calls he receives from a local hospital.

Ask a married priest to assist in a nursing home when pastoral care is called for. The absence of clergy to serve the elderly in nursing homes in New England prompted Louise Haggett, a zealous Catholic woman from Massachusetts, five years ago to found the C.I.T.I. (Celibacy Is The Issue) movement, which has already become a national phenomenon involving married priests in all aspects of ministry.

Invite a married priest to lead a retreat or day of recollection. Anthony Padovano served as retreat master for a group of nuns a few years ago in Jacksonville after he spent the summer on the theological faculty of Notre Dame. John and Mary Jane O'Brien of Baltimore conduct retreats now and then for a small community of lay apostles in Western Maryland.

Include married priests in your own services to celebrate a jubilee or to honor the departed. Or simply arrange for them to conduct a scripture study or home discussion on a

spiritual topic. But, most of all, regard them as fellow Christians sharing the discipleship of Jesus.

In her remarks at the Baltimore Regional Community Chapter earlier this year, Janet K. Ruffing, R.S.M., reminded her audience that "it is a time for gratitude and a time for forgiveness and reconciliation." Religious women are in a situation not unlike that of National Public Radio and TV, which asks, "If we don't do it, who will?"

Support for married priests as individuals is another step toward the full par-

ticipation of women in the Church. Sr. Joan Chittister, O.S.B., commended the married priests at the CORPUS conference in 1995 for their endorsement of women's advocacy, and warned, "The Church will not prosper until it gets right with women."

The married priest has forfeited all in his belief that priests with partners further the ministry of both. He has affirmed the equality of women and given his life for this belief. Greater love than this cannot be found.



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Catherine McAuley and the Option for the Poor

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Marilyn Sunderman, R.S.M.

IN A PRESENTATION in El Escorial, Spain, in 1972, Gustavo Gutiérrez used the phrase "option for the poor." I'd like to explore the option for the poor in Catherine McAuley's life and writings. I will do so by situating Catherine's love of the poor within the context of the treatment of the option for the poor in the Latin American Bishops' Medellín and Puebla documents, the United States Bishops' pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, and Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern). I reflect upon the option for the poor as central to Catherine McAuley's original vision of living Mercy. Then, I conclude with some challenges and suggestions for all who desire to extend Catherine's love of the poor into the next millennium.

The Option for the Poor

Who are the poor? They are those who lack basic necessities. They are persons who live on the margins of life. The poor are the materially disadvantaged and economically deprived in the global community. The majority of the world's poor are women and their children. In professions, politics, and churches, many women still find themselves

barred from high salaried and high level decision-making positions. Hence, in the human community, poverty maintains a distinctly feminine face.

The option for the poor entails a commitment to stand with the economically disadvantaged against their poverty. Such a stance involves a transformation of consciousness. It requires learning to view reality through the eyes of poor persons. One who undergoes such a conversion becomes quick to heed Jesus' call to hear and respond to the cries of the poor.¹ One takes up the cause of the poor by working with them to enable them to satisfy their basic needs for food, clothing, housing, education, and health care.

In the human community,
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To opt for the poor means to see poor persons in Christ and Christ in them. It involves recognizing the suffering Christ in the faces of underpaid workers, children lacking proper nutrition and clothing, the underemployed and un-

employed, the homeless, persons dying with AIDS, and the lonely elderly. It is to make Christ's preferential love of the poor one's own. It is, in essence, to become sensitized to the supreme privilege of loving one's disadvantaged sisters and brothers. It is to consciously and actively take up their cause in solidarity by sharing their struggles and concerns.

Medellín and Puebla Documents

In August-September, 1968, the Second General Conference of the Latin American Bishops took place in Medellín, Colombia. The documents of this conference reflect the conversion of heart of

the Latin American Bishops. This resulted in their more wholehearted response to the cries of their exploited sisters and brothers through a commitment to a preferential option for the poor.

In the following excerpt from one of the Medellín documents, the Latin American Bishops clearly and dynamically enunciate their option for the poor:

We ought to sharpen the awareness of our duty of solidarity with the poor, to which charity leads us. This solidarity means that we make ours their problems and their struggles . . . This has to be concretized in criticism of injustice and oppression, in the struggle against the intolerable situation which a poor person often has to tolerate, in the willingness to dialogue with the groups responsible for that situation in order to make them understand their obligations.²

work, housing, health and recreation.³

The Puebla Final Document reaffirms the commitment of the Bishops at Medellín to the preferential option for the poor. It gives faces to poor persons: peasants, laborers, shanty dwellers, the unemployed, and the underemployed.⁴ It insists that the option for the poor is not optional. Rather, it is a constituent of the gospel message.

Economic Justice for All

In their 1986 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, the Bishops of the United States

that "Decisions must be judged in light of what they do for the poor, what they do to the poor, and what they enable the poor to do for themselves."⁵

In their letter, the Bishops describe the principle of participation whereby they call upon members of the human community to support poor persons in their efforts to actively engage in shaping their own future.⁶ According to the Bishops, such empowerment is key to addressing the reality of economic poverty which plagues much of the world community. In addition, the Bishops stress that education is crucial to effecting change in the lives of those who suffer economic deprivation.

Decisions must be judged in light of what they do for the poor, what they do to the poor, and what they enable the poor to do for themselves.

A decade after the Medellín conference, the Latin American Bishops met again in Puebla, Mexico. The Puebla conference affirmed and intensified the content of the Medellín documents. The Puebla Final Document stresses that fundamental human rights must be recognized, protected, and promoted. It specifies that human rights include the right to life, the exercise of legitimate self-determination, equality for all, and the right to education,

reflect on the meaning of the option for the economically poor. Like their Latin American counterparts, the American Bishops assert that this option is essential to following Christ. It is a moral imperative.

In *Economic Justice for All*, the Bishops insist that those who determine local, national, and international social policies must give preeminent consideration to the impact such policies will have on the lives of poor persons. The Bishops emphatically assert

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

In December, 1987, Pope John Paul II promulgated *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), an encyclical which commemorated the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples). *On Social Concern* is in organic unity with Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* which "called upon the developed nations to assist the poor nations in their self-development."⁷

John Paul II's *On Social Concern* treats the option for the poor in reflecting on the meaning of human dignity, rights and freedom, dehumanizing social structures, development versus superdevelopment, and the ecological

crisis. The Pope notes that, in the human community, "an innumerable multitude of people—children, adults and the elderly—are suffering under the intolerable burden of poverty."⁸

The situation of poverty prevalent in developing countries is reflective of the ever-widening gap between rich countries in the Northern hemisphere and poor ones in the Southern parts of the globe. Within this context, the Pope cites the dehumanizing situation of a drastic shortage of food, lack of potable water, inadequate health care, and sub-standard housing in the Southern hemisphere.

In *On Social Concern*, John Paul II contrasts the situation of underdevelopment of nations in the South with the superdevelopment of countries in the North. The Pope insists that superdevelopment in Western society is the primary cause of poverty in the developing countries of the world. According to John Paul II,

Superdevelopment, which consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain groups, easily makes people slaves of "possession" and of immediate gratification, with no other horizon than the multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better . . . An object already owned but not superseded by something better is discarded, with no thought of

its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer.⁹

The Western culture of consumerism, in effect, results in real suffering for the poor of the world by making resources unavailable to them which they need to survive and develop.

The Pope insists that superdevelopment in Western society is the primary cause of poverty in the developing countries of the world.

The Pope reflects on the superpowers' irrational need in recent decades to procure caches of nuclear weapons. This has resulted in an unparalleled use of both material and financial resources to stockpile these instruments of mass destruction not only for superpower countries but also for their allies. As a result, there has been no substantive global response to the desperate economic and social needs of developing countries.

The virtue of solidarity is the appropriate antidote for superdevelopment. This virtue binds members of the global community in a preferential love of the poor. It causes persons to be disturbed when they encounter others who are "suffering under the intolerable burden of poverty."¹⁰ It compels those who opt for the poor to express their concern for them in con-

crete expressions of love and service.

Solidarity embraces the way of interdependence which requires that those who have a greater amount of goods and services share them with those in need. Likewise, interdependence is evidenced when wealthy countries cease to en-

gage in exploitative practices against poor persons. Interdependence also manifests itself in the mutual support of those who are economically disadvantaged. In *On Social Concern*, John Paul II links ecological concerns to the option for the poor. The word "ecology" derives from *oikos*, a Greek word which means home or household. The earth is home for all created reality. Each part of the earth mirrors the Divine. Trees and toads, water and rocks, meadows and mountains, birds and bees, women and men all uniquely contribute to the whole.¹¹ To exploit any part of the earth is to violate its God-given value.

The option for the poor and the option for ecology are inter-related.

There is no way we can attend to the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed,

unless we attend at the same time to the "poor" of endangered species, strip-mined hills, eroded croplands, polluted rivers, acidified lakes and gutted mountains. It is all of a piece, justice for poor people, justice for the earth. If we divorce people from the earth and pretend we are working for the poor while ignoring what is happening to their life-support systems, i.e., oceans, air, soil, plant and animal species, we are duping ourselves and them.¹²

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An example of consciousness of the inherent connection between the earth and humankind lies in the fact that the people of Enriquillo, Dominican Republic, tolled the church bells all day when their ecological reserve—nineteen ancient ceiba trees—was felled to make way for the construction of high-priced homes. The people felt a deep interdependence with the trees which had companioned them in their sojourn in life. They decried others' lack of reverence for this part of the earth community. In effect, the people of Enriquillo were con-

scious that their option for the earth had been violated.

Catherine McAuley and the Option for the Poor

Catherine McAuley, a nineteenth century woman with Irish roots and heritage, lived out the option for the poor as depicted in the various Church documents cited in this study. Catherine upheld fundamental human rights. She promoted the principle of

sionately loved the poor. During her life, she became completely dedicated to them. Her devotion to the poor animated her whole being. It was reflected in her choice to bring all her energies and resources to bear on supporting the poor in her society. According to Clare A. Moore, one of Catherine's companions in Mercy: "Every talent and every penny that our dear foundress possessed had been devoted to the poor."¹³

Catherine was born into the monied class. From her father James, early in life she learned what it means to embrace an option for the poor. Catherine's father modeled for his daughter how to reach out generously and compassionately to disadvantaged persons. On Sundays, for example, he gathered poor children in his home where he provided them with religious instruction and offered them food and clothing.

Firsthand Experience of Economic Poverty

By the time Catherine was twenty years old, her mother and father were both deceased. When she went to live with her uncle Owen Conway and his family, Catherine experienced firsthand the meaning of economic poverty. During her stay with the Conways, there were times when she and the others had only a little bread to eat at night and the floor on which to sleep.¹⁴

participation in relationship to the poor in the Ireland of her day. Hers was a stance of solidarity and interdependence with the economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, she engaged in efforts to effect systemic change of dehumanizing social structures in the society in which she lived and worked.

Catherine rooted and grounded her preferential love of the poor in Mercy. At the heart of her understanding of Mercy was an intimate connectedness between loving God and loving those who suffer poverty. Catherine pas-

Life with the Callaghans

The twenty years Catherine spent living with the Callaghans contrasted markedly with her days with the Conways. The Callaghans possessed ample financial means. They realized

their responsibilities before God to share their wealth with the poor, particularly those who were employed on their estate, and the many poor families who existed in real destitution in the nearby village of Coolock.¹⁵

Catherine's experience at Coolock shaped her vision of Mercy as a concrete way of living out a preferential love for the poor. There she was able to bring comfort and help to the sick and needy families, train young girls for employment, teach poor children, and gather the staff at the house for prayer and religious instruction.¹⁶

Perhaps the experience that most defined Catherine's vision of Mercy occurred when a young girl from nearby came to Coolock House and,

confiding that she feared she would not be able to withstand much longer the approaches of her young master, begged Catherine to find her shelter until she could get other employment. Without delay, Catherine journeyed to Dublin to seek a place for her in a . . . home in the city. Greatly to her chagrin, she was told that all applications were dealt with by the Ladies' Committee which met weekly. Catherine pointed out that the need

was urgent, but to no purpose. Sad to tell, when shelter was offered it was too late. In her grief Catherine then and there resolved that if ever she had the means she would provide a roof for girls in a similar plight. Never could she forget that girl who sought refuge and found none.¹⁷

This experience etched itself permanently in Catherine's memory. It sparked her dream of eventually renting at least a few rooms to provide for women in similar urgent need. And perhaps it was this experience that compelled her to declare: "The poor need help today, not next week."¹⁸

St. Mary's Parish

At St. Mary's Parish, Catherine volunteered to teach religion to poor children who were students there. Following in her father's footsteps, she provided food and clothing to the pupils in the school. She visited the poor in the vicinity and sought to empower them to help themselves. To this end, she taught needlework and crafts to students at St. Mary's. Furthermore, she rented a nearby house where the students' work could be exhibited and sold.¹⁹

Bridge Between Rich and Poor

Catherine's experience of both wealth and poverty in her own life enabled her to become a personal bridge between the two classes and cul-

tures. "With the aristocrats, she could be one; and an hour afterward, she could place herself on a level with the poorest family in Ireland."²⁰ Having experienced poverty first hand, Catherine was able to guide others in compassionately responding to those in need. She inspired the rich to join her in efforts to help the economically disadvantaged.

At her Baggot St. House, Catherine nurtured her original vision of Mercy as embracing a preferential love of the poor. By the time this house opened, Catherine had almost completely expended her inheritance on this project and various others. Hence, she decided to send a letter to her wealthy friends inviting them to support this new endeavor. How deep was Catherine's trust that God would enable the work of housing and educating needy children and providing a residence for working women to proceed at Baggot St.!

Catherine's vision of Mercy was one of responding to poor persons with great tenderness and affection. She desired that the poor consider her own and her Sisters' "services as rendered to those of their own family, since by the religious adoption of poverty, they were united in a common bond with all the poor."²¹ Catherine was deeply convinced that the preferential love of the poor meant working with them, especially through education, to improve their condition.

The Passion of Christ, Simplicity, and Prayer

Catherine grounded her option for the poor in her special devotion to Christ's passion. For Catherine, the crucified Christ was identified with the poor. Christ's complete self-divestment on the cross in the name of love deeply inspired her to follow Him in living in solidarity with the poor.

Religious who, like the poor, must be satisfied to want conveniences.²⁴

Prayer was a central part of Catherine's reaching out in love to the unemployed, illiterate, sick and dying poor. She began and ended her works of Mercy with prayer. She urged her Sisters to live out their option for the poor in a similar contemplative fashion. In so doing, she and

following Him, has in all ages of the Church elicited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor.²⁶

Testifying to the fact that Catherine lived out this Rule in her own life, Dr. James O'Mahony, O.F.M., Cap. declared: "In her the spirit of Christ went out in love and tenderness and mercy to the Christ . . . in the very poor."²⁷

Catherine expressed her preferential love of the poor by embracing a life of simplicity.

Catherine expressed her preferential love of the poor by embracing a life of simplicity. She insisted, for instance, that she be the last to be served at meals in her community.²² This action demonstrated her desire to identify with the poor who seldom if ever are first to be seated at table and then have to accept whatever is left to eat.

Catherine's way of viewing dress demonstrated her resolve to live out her option for the poor. She often "deprived herself of articles of dress . . . to relieve the necessities of her neighbors."²³ Regarding dress, Catherine advised her Sisters:

Let us even love to want what is convenient and necessary to us, and rejoice, if possible, when we are not supplied with everything we require or wish for, since we are poor

her Sisters acknowledged that doing Mercy is God's work, i.e., that God seeks to be present to the needy through others' love of them.

Ministry to Jesus

Catherine considered herself privileged to love the poor of her day. She instructed her Sisters: "What an ineffable consolation to serve Christ himself in the person of the poor and to walk in the very same path which he trod!"²⁵ In the faces and lives of the poor, sick, and uneducated, Catherine met Christ. She sought out the poor to pour out Christ's love upon them.

Catherine stated in her Original Rule of her Mercy community:

Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of

Path of Mercy: Path of Preferential Love of the Poor

For Catherine, the path of Mercy provided a concrete way to en flesh her preferential love of the poor. In true Mercy hospitality, she and her Sisters welcomed the distressed into their lives. They demonstrated a deep respect for others' dignity. Through education, they empowered poor persons to meet their own and others' needs. They reached out to the homeless, the dying, and the depressed with compassionate hearts.

The ultimate example of Catherine's preferential love of the poor occurred on the day she died. She asked that her homemade shoes be placed in the burning coals of the kitchen fire.²⁸ Catherine's shoes symbolized her identification with the poor. Perhaps through dispossessing herself of her shoes, the message she sought to communicate was her desire that the love of poor persons which consumed her life en spirit her

Sisters throughout their lives in Mercy.

Catherine urged the Sisters associated with each of the original Mercy foundations to preach Jesus' good news to the poor. Catherine's very life inspired her Sisters to live out a preferential love of the poor. Catherine once declared: "I would rather be cold and hungry than that God's poor should be deprived of any consolation in my power to afford them."²⁹ Furthermore, she instructed her Sisters: "It is better to relieve a hundred impostors—if there be any such—than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty."³⁰ This last statement sums up Catherine's deep and abiding commitment to a preferential love of the poor.

Challenge for Today and Tomorrow

The challenge today is to keep Catherine's preferential love of the poor alive in Mercy. The circle of Mercy must continually widen to more and more fully embrace the diversity of needs of poor persons. The mission of Mercy today, like that of Catherine and her original companions, is to respond wholeheartedly to such needs as they arise.

Catherine's contemporary companions are meant to be agents of change in society. In making the works of Mercy the business of her life, Catherine expressed her social consciousness. Likewise, today her spiritual daughters and

sons must continue to bring Mercy to many by embracing the social dimensions of the gospel.

Today and tomorrow, Catherine challenges others to make personal and corporate choices to live out a preferential love of the economically disadvantaged. This option can take shape in various ways in individual and collective lives. Adopting a simpler lifestyle, for example, is a way individuals and groups can more closely identify with poor persons.

Today and tomorrow,
Catherine challenges others
to make personal
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disadvantaged.

Another way to live out the option for the poor is by developing a critical attitude toward socio-economic policies. Such hermeneutical suspicion can lead to engaging in public witness against unjust social policies and sometimes experiencing radical consequences such as periods of incarceration.

Experiences with persons in situations of economic deprivation in one's own country or in developing countries are helpful. They provide one with the opportunity to learn what one's sisters and brothers need in order to effect change toward their own betterment.

The worldwide community of the Sisters of Mercy enjoys a rich tradition of embracing the option for the poor in and through a panoply of both institutional and non-institutional commitments. It is tempting to rest on past or current accomplishments toward bettering the situation of the economically disadvantaged. Nonetheless, the urgency in Catherine's reminder that the poor always and forever need help compels us to continue to respond to God's grace to stand with the poor in

new ways into the next millennium.

The current Mercy Institute Direction Statement echoes Catherine's vision of embracing the option for the poor. The Statement reiterates Catherine's preferential love of the poor, especially women and children. It includes a commitment to follow in Catherine's footsteps by working to bring about systemic change. In a society that retained a Penal Code which was designed to deprive persons of the opportunity of a Catholic education, for example, Catherine boldly opposed this system of injustice. She did so

by initiating multiple educational endeavors, beginning with the establishment of a classroom in the Baggot St. House.

The present Mercy Institute Direction Statement sets forth the ecological dimension of the option for the poor by developing the connectedness between being at one with the poor and with the earth. It reminds us that we bless the earth through choosing to live simply. In this way, we reverence earth's fragility and her need to replenish her resources. Furthermore, by so doing, we enhance the possibility of our less advantaged sisters and brothers' sharing in stewarding the precious resources of our common home, earth.

Finally, as we follow today in Catherine's footsteps by embracing a profound preferential love of the poor, we need to consider what solidarity with the poor means for us individually and corporately on a day-to-day basis. What innovative ways can we discover to build better bridges between the rich and the economically poor in society? As Catherine did, so must we trust that our provident God will be with us as we discern how to respond to the needs of our time. Just as Catherine began new endeavors such as inaugurating a soup kitchen in the Baggot St. House, so are we called to creatively live out our preferential option for the poor in the here and now and into the future.

Notes

1. See Luke 6:24 and 16:19-31; also, Matt 19:21.
2. Medellín Documents, in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council*, ed. Louise Michael Colonnese (Bogota: General Secretariat of Celam, 1970), vol. 2, 216, 217.
3. Puebla Final Document, in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*, ed. Jon Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) No. 1268-1276, 280 and 503, 194.
4. *Ibid.*, Nos. 31-41, 128, 129.
5. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, Origins 16 (November 27, 1986) Par. 24, 115.
6. *Ibid.*, Par. 188, 430.
7. Gregory Baum, "The Anti-Cold War Encyclical," *The Ecumenist* 26 (July-August 1988): 665, 666.
8. Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern)," Origins 17 (Mar 3, 1988) No. 13, 646.
9. *Ibid.*, No. 28, 650.
10. *Ibid.*, No. 13, 646.
11. Jane Blewett, "The Greening of Catholic Social Thought? (John Paul II's 'Ecology' Encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*)," *Pro Mundi Vita Studies* 13 (February 1990): 29.
12. *Ibid.*, 31.
13. Clare Augustine Moore, "Memoir."
14. Bertrand Degnan, R.S.M., *Mercy Unto Thousands* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957), 16.
15. M. Nathy, *Catherine McAuley: Mercy Foundress* (Dublin: Veritas, 1979), 14.
16. Margaret Cunningham, *Catherine McAuley: New Insights Into Her Spirituality* (Galway: Campus Publishing, 1994), 13.
17. Roland Burke Savage, S.J., *Catherine McAuley: The First Sister of Mercy* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd., 1949), 36, 37.
18. M. Angela Bolster, R.S.M., *Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy* (Dublin: Dominion Publications, 1990), 11 quoting C. McAuley.
19. Cunningham, *Catherine McAuley*, 14.
20. A Sister of Mercy of the Diocese of Oklahoma, *The Spirit of M. Catherine McAuley* (Oklahoma City: Sisters of Mercy, Mt. St. Mary's Academy, 1922), 65.
21. *Ibid.*, 34.
22. Cunningham, *Catherine McAuley*, 50.
23. *The Spirit of M. Catherine McAuley*, 8.
24. Catherine McAuley, *Familiar Instructions* (St. Louis: Vincentian Press, 1927), 34.
25. *Ibid.*, 16.
26. Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 297 quoting the Original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy, Chapter 3, Article 1.
27. Bolster, R.S.M., *Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy*, 51 quoting C. McAuley.
28. Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., "The Spirit's Fire and Catherine's Passion," *The MAST Journal* 6 (Spring 1995): 14.
29. *Familiar Instructions*, 136.
30. Joanna Regan, R.S.M. & Isabel Keiss, R.S.M., *Tender Courage* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 77.



Catherine Josephine Seton and the New York Mercy Experience

Ann Miriam Gallagher, R.S.M.

IT HAS BEEN WITH MUCH interest that I have devoted considerable time during recent years in researching the life of Catherine Josephine Seton. Who was Catherine Josephine Seton? She was the daughter of Elizabeth Ann Seton who founded the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 1809 and who, in 1975, became the first native born citizen of the United States to be canonized a saint of the Church. She was also the first New York Sister of Mercy, who at the age of forty-six years entered the Mercy Community several months after the 1846 foundation had been made in New York City from Dublin, Ireland; and, she continued as Sister Catherine or Mother Catherine in the Mercy Community until her death in 1891.

What has my research revealed thus far? It has shown that Catherine Seton's life of almost forty-five years as a Sister of Mercy was one of significance to the history of nineteenth-century American women religious. It has also indicated that her life of forty-six years before becoming a Sister of Mercy was a fascinating one which could only have enhanced her life as a religious. I am pleased to share with you selected highlights of

the first forty-six years of Catherine's life, after which I will present an overview of her forty-five years of Mercy Life, pointing out some of the ways she became an important part of what I call "The New York Mercy Experience."

The First Forty-Six Years (1800-1846): Secular Life

Early Years, 1800-1821¹

Catherine Josephine Seton was born on Staten Island, New York, on June 28, 1800 to Elizabeth Bayley Seton, prominent New York socialite, and William Magee Seton, eminent New York import merchant. This second youngest of the Seton's five children was about three-and-a-half years old when her father died in 1803. When her mother converted from Episcopalianism to Roman Catholicism in 1805, so also did she along with her sisters, Anna Maria (Annina) and Rebecca, and her brothers, William and Richard. In 1808 she left New York to live in Baltimore where her mother opened a school for girls. In 1809 the nine-year-old Catherine traveled to a new home in Emmitsburg, Maryland, some sixty miles northwest of Baltimore,

where her mother founded the Sisters of Charity and St. Joseph's School for girls.

Her home from the early summer of 1809 to late February or early March of 1821 was in Emmitsburg. There she attended classes in her mother's school where she eventually became a successful teacher, especially of piano and voice. She served as secretary to her mother, mainly when it came to correspondence relating to family matters. She accompanied members of her mother's sisterhood on their travels into town on errands of mercy and to purchase supplies for the community and school. She formed deep and lasting friendships with the sisters and students of St. Joseph's. She did the same with members of the nearby Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary community, particularly with Father John DuBois, the institution's founder, and future third bishop of New York, who became a father-figure for her.

Catherine rejoiced with her mother in witnessing the growth of St. Joseph's and the extension of the Sisters of Charity to Philadelphia in 1814 and to New York in 1817. And, she had a fair share of sorrow in Emmitsburg. During her almost twelve

years there, she experienced the loss of many members of the religious sisterhood and her own family. These included her sisters, Anna Maria and Rebecca; her aunts, Cecilia and Harriet Seton; and, ultimately her own mother.

In Annapolis, she delighted in parties,
including those hosted for French
officers on leave from their vessels in the
bay, and with whom she was able to
converse adequately in French.

Although her home was in Emmitsburg for almost twelve years, there was a life for her elsewhere at periods during that time. After seven full years in Emmitsburg, she set out in 1816 at sixteen years of age on a series of at least five lengthy excursions (ranging from several weeks to more than three months at a time), arranged by her mother for health and social-cultural purposes. The trips took her to Baltimore, Annapolis, Philadelphia, New York City, and Carrollton Manor in present-day Frederick County, Maryland. In Baltimore she studied art and music with private instructors and became acquainted with Mrs. Catherine Harper, daughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the last and only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of the wealthiest men of the nation. In Annapolis, she was the guest of the same

Charles Carroll in his elegant mansion on the Severn River where she delighted in parties, including those he hosted for French officers on leave from their vessels in the bay, and with whom she was able to converse adequately in French. In Philadelphia, she

was introduced to the social life of Julia Scott, her mother's wealthy Protestant widow-friend and benefactress, who, after Elizabeth Seton's death, became her "second mother." In New York City, she visited with relatives on both the maternal and paternal sides of her family, almost all of whom she had not seen for many years. She also toured parts of the city, being especially charmed by observing women in the newest fashions promenading on Broadway. At Carrollton Manor, the summer home of Charles Carroll, located on his vast estate about forty miles south of Emmitsburg, she socialized with celebrities such as the widow of Stephen Decatur, hero of the Tripolitan War and one of the most distinguished members of the U.S. Navy, while also serving as tutor to Carroll's grand-daughters, Emily and

Elizabeth Harper, on vacation from her mother's school.

Her last excursion, the one to Carrollton Manor, ended sometime in August 1820 when she returned to Emmitsburg. By the end of that month, her mother's health had deteriorated so rapidly that death seemed imminent. Preparing for death, Elizabeth Seton renewed her religious vows on September 24, 1820 in the presence of Catherine, some of the Sisters, and Father Simon Bruté (future first Bishop of Vincennes), Elizabeth's spiritual director from Mount Saint Mary's. While her mother lingered, Catherine sent accounts of her physical condition to Julia Scott in Philadelphia. On December 26 she relayed news that her mother was becoming weaker and was reduced "almost to a skeleton in appearance." "As you suppose," she wrote, "I am chief nurse and too happy to be so—this employment is dearer to my heart than can ever be imagined or expected."² Elizabeth Seton died about a week later, January 4, 1821. Catherine was the only of her children present when death came. Anna Maria and Rebecca had died some years earlier, and William and Richard were now making their own way in a world far beyond Emmitsburg.

Adventures and Restlessness, 1821–1846

An extremely sad and broken-hearted Catherine Seton left

Emmitsburg in late February or early March of 1821, just a few months short of her twenty-first birthday. She departed, knowing that she was the sole heir of her mother's \$2500.00 funded family estate. Further, she took with her some of her mother's personal property, including furniture, correspondence, and her wedding ring.³ For the next quarter of a century her home was in Baltimore with her friends, the Harpers, and in New York City with her Aunt Mary Post and with her brother, William, after his marriage to the wealthy Emily Prime of Westchester County. She enjoyed a wide circle of acquaintances, and in the words of an admirer, became known for her "beauty, wit, and social accomplishments."⁴ She received marriage proposals. They included one made by the British Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Stratford Canning (later the famous Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, British Ambassador at Constantinople), to whom she was first introduced by Charles Carroll of Carrollton.

Catherine traveled extensively in Europe. Her lengthy, detailed, and exciting travel journals along with correspondence related to her foreign travel will constitute the basis of a separate study sometime in the future. For now, a sampling. All told, she made three European trips between 1829 and 1840, totaling almost six years of residency abroad. The first was made

with her brother, William, while he was on an extended leave from the U.S. Navy in 1829 and 1830. With old and new friends, she visited many parts of Italy and France, sight-seeing and socializing, and keeping abreast of political events of the day. Spending much time in Florence, Italy (then the Grand Duchy of the Austrian Dukes of Lorraine), she became acquainted with Florentine nobility, political exiles and their families, American and European socialites, diplomats, and business people residing in the city. In Rome, she lived for several months at the renowned Convent of the Sacré

1830 and joined Lafayette, Talleyrand, and others as they hosted victory celebrations marking the overthrow of the Bourbon Monarchy.

The second trip took place in 1835 and 1836. In the company of Mrs. Harper and her daughter, Emily (who would be a life-long friend of Catherine and a great philanthropist of the Sisters of Mercy), she journeyed through parts of England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Holland. Her countless adventures included climbing the Swiss Alps at least twice. Among her many new acquaintances were Cornelia

**All told, she made three European trips
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Coeur Sisters where she had the leisure to study Italian, French, and the guitar, participate in religious exercises, entertain visitors, and make friends with other women who, like herself, took advantage of the privileges afforded them by the institution. While in Rome, she also toured parts of the city with her dear friend, Bishop John DuBois, then on a begging trip in Europe for his New York diocese. In France, after staying for a while at the country home of the venerable statesman, Lafayette, she took up residence in Paris. There she was caught up in the Revolution of

Peacock Connelly, future foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and her husband, Pierce, for whose formal abjuration of the Episcopal faith and acceptance of Roman Catholicism in Rome she was present.

The third European trip occurred from 1838 to 1840 when she traveled with her brother, William, his wife, and their children. For a time, they constituted part of the elite "American Circle" in Nice, France (then ruled by the House of Savoy), after which they settled down in Florence. In Florence, she renewed old friendships and formed new

ones. She frequented balls, banquets, concerts, ballets, operas, designer dress shops, museums, and churches. It was especially during the "Florence phase" of this last European trip that she experienced a severe case of restlessness. In a letter to Julia Scott, she confessed that "the novelty of Europe" was over for her, that her destiny seemed to be that of a wanderer who was "always on the go," and that she was simply "weary to death of it [all]."⁵ Leaving William and his family in Florence, she returned to New York City alone in April 1840. She was almost forty years of age at the time.

I trust to live for God now, though I may truly exclaim with St. Augustine, "Eternal Beauty how late have I known thee, how late I have loved thee."

Back in New York she engaged in numerous works of charity, guided by Bishop John DuBois. She kept up an extensive correspondence with her first-cousin, James Roosevelt Bayley, future first bishop of Newark and eighth archbishop of Baltimore, particularly during his studies and travels in Paris and Rome: she encouraged him in his conversion from Episcopalianism to Roman Catholicism; she sought his advice on what should be read by new and potential converts to the Faith whom she was instructing; she

kept him informed of issues dealing with the Church of the United States, including the crucial Catholic school question in New York; and she shared with him something of her personal life, noting at one point that she was likely to remain in her "status quo"—the single state—even though gentlemen admirers continued to show an interest in her.⁶

Catherine spent time at St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg in the spring of 1842, having first written to the Superior, Mother Xavier Clarke (who, like herself, had been with Elizabeth Seton when she died), the reason for the con-

templated visit: "I long to visit my early home once more, to see again several friends."⁷ The Emmitsburg trip was followed by visiting old acquaintances in Baltimore, by assisting with music for the Requiem Mass at the Baltimore cathedral for the recently deceased Bishop John England of Charleston, and by making a lengthy spiritual retreat at the cathedral. After returning to New York, she reflected on the graces received from the Emmitsburg visit and the Baltimore retreat. Writing to Mother Xavier of those ex-

periences, she said: "... I trust to live for God now, though I may truly exclaim with St. Augustine, 'Eternal Beauty how late have I known thee, how late I have loved thee.'"⁸

In 1842, Catherine lost two people who had been very significant in her life: Julia Scott, her "second mother" since Elizabeth Seton's death in 1821, and John DuBois who had been a father figure for her since they first met in Emmitsburg in 1809. She was with Bishop DuBois when he passed away. What he meant to her over the years is perhaps best summed up in what she wrote to James Roosevelt Bayley following his death: "I knelt by his dying bed as his spirit departed, and mourned him as my oldest best friend."⁹

With the loss of Bishop DuBois, Catherine depended a great deal on the support and counsel of Bishop (later Archbishop) John Hughes, DuBois' successor to the see of New York. Many years earlier, her mother had helped persuade DuBois to admit Hughes to his seminary at Mt. St. Mary's where he was employed as the institution's gardener and over-seer of slaves. Now the same Hughes was to play a key role in her daughter's future. Catherine was fully aware of the work of the two communities of women religious in New York City at the time—the Religious of the Sacred Heart and her mother's community, the Sisters of Charity. When she expressed interest in pursuing some form of religious life, Bishop

Hughes encouraged her to hold off on a final decision until after the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy he was bringing over from Dublin. He introduced her to them soon after they made their New York foundation on May 14, 1846 while living as guests of the Sisters of Charity at Saint Joseph's Select School in East Broadway.¹⁰

The Last Forty-Five Years (1846-1891): Religious Life

Entrance to Silver Jubilee of Profession, 1846-1874

Several months after that introduction, on October 11, 1846, at the age of forty-six years, Catherine Seton entered the Mercy Community at the Convent of Mercy, in Manhattan's No. 18 Washington Place West¹¹ as the first New York Mercy choir postulant, bringing to the community \$1000.00 in funds and an open-ended family pledge of a \$500.00 annual stipend. A few days later, the thirty-one year old superior, Mother Agnes O'Connor, in a letter to the Mercys in Dublin, recorded the event in these words:

I consider the entrance of our new Sister Catherine (Miss Seton) a singular favor from Providence, she being a person very influential amongst Catholics and Protestants of the first distinction. She sings delightfully; her voice is of the highest note and cultivation.¹²

Mother Agnes' hopes for Catherine Seton expressed in that letter as one who might play a vital role in helping mold the Mercy Community in New York were echoed a few years later by Bishop John Hughes. In a letter written April 16, 1849 to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore, Hughes declared:

Miss [Catherine] Seton [now known as Sister Mary Catherine] is to make her solemn Profession of religion tomorrow; and judging by the fervor and unbounded self-denial of her novitiate, if ever [a] daughter rivaled the sanctity of such a mother as hers, she is the one.¹³

About forty years later, Mercy chronicler Mother Austin Carroll, in her multi-volume work, *Annals from the Leaves of the Sisters of Mercy*, presented vivid accounts of how the New York Sisters of Mercy, in helping to meet the overwhelming needs of New York's mushrooming population, engaged

cate and prepare them for future employment, and to serve as a placement agency from which they might find respectable work and earn a decent living. She wrote of their circulating libraries, schools, orphanages, sodalities, visitations of the poor, sick, and oppressed in homes, in hospitals, and in prisons. In commenting on their prison ministry, Mother Austin Carroll gave special recognition to Catherine Seton. Her words follow:

The experience of the Sisters [of Mercy] in the [New York] city prison, or Tombs, would fill volumes. Malefactors of every country and degree have there claimed their ministrations. Numbers have been converted of whom some died true penitents, and others have become useful members of society. In reclaiming these, Mother Catherine Seton spent the greater part of her active life as a Sister of Mercy. She even took the trouble, at her somewhat mature age to keep up by

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in a range of almost unlimited ministries permitted by the rule of their foundress. She wrote of the House of Mercy which they established mainly to shelter immigrant women (especially of Ireland), to edu-

study, her knowledge of modern languages that she might be able to instruct or console the prisoners of all nations whom she encountered in this awful abode, which she did to the great comfort of many a poor foreigner . . . This good woman

is loved and venerated by thousands, in the prisons and outside of them . . . She is truly the prisoners' friend.¹⁴

Catherine Seton's involvement in prison work dates back to the very early history of the New York Sisters of Mercy. Within a year of their arrival in New York, the Sisters were approached by the City's Commissioners of Charity who offered them free access to the city's prisons as well as to its hospitals and other institutions. Catherine, possibly while still a novice, began to organize prison ministry for the young community. As it developed, the ministry included visits of a few Sisters several times a week not only to the Tombs, the city prison, but also to the more distant state prison of Sing Sing at Ossining, and to the penitentiary on Blackwell Island (now Roosevelt Island) in the East River. "The Annals of the New York Sisters of Mercy," in describing Catherine's initial enthusiasm for this work, state:

As soon as she began the visitation of the Tombs, she set herself the task of learning German and Spanish [being already fluent in Italian and French], in order that her usefulness among the unhappy inmates might find no limit.¹⁵

Catherine, possibly while still a novice, began to organize prison ministry for the young community.

The same "Annals," her letters, and other sources provide additional information on the continued zeal she manifested almost exclusively with male prisoners at the Tombs, at Sing Sing, and on Blackwell Island. She kept them supplied with spiritual reading materials, rosaries, medals, stamps, writing paper, clothing, tobacco, and toilet articles. She personally instructed them in the Faith and encouraged them to join the League of the Sacred Heart, a confraternity for prisoners, founded by the Sisters of Mercy and designed to promote the prisoners' spiritual and moral growth. She assured them that she would look after their families in time of need. She provided spiritual consolation to them as they awaited their executions. She rejoiced with them when their executions were commuted (and in some cases, partly because of her influence). And she labored ardently to improve their living and working conditions by urging wardens, doctors, and others to seriously pursue over-all prison reform.

Once released from prison, these men often kept her informed about their lives. They visited her, they wrote to

her, and they sometimes sent her gifts and remembrances of themselves. On one occasion, she received a "gift" from a former prisoner who was living in Philadelphia shortly before he died. It was a trunk containing a small assortment of clothing for distribution to the poor, and a wide variety of pistols, jimnies (crowbars), and other burglar's tools for whatever use she might have for them. Gifts associated with her prison work also came from her Mercy community. When she celebrated the Silver Jubilee of her profession in 1874 (April 17), she was delighted to receive as presents from the Sisters several suits of men's clothing with twenty-five dollars in silver concealed in a pocket of each suit. It was clothing for prisoners and former prisoners, and money for them and their families.

Silver Jubilee of Profession to Death, 1874-1891

At the time of her Silver Jubilee of Profession in 1874, Catherine Seton was almost seventy-five years old. Shortly afterwards, she found it necessary to withdraw from active prison ministry. However, almost until her death many years later, she was entrusted with the general supervision of that work. Community records note that "it was a matter of course for the sisters who had visited the prison[s] to turn into Mother Catherine's room at evening recreation and give her [an] account of the day."¹⁶

Throughout her entire religious life, she was much immersed in a vast number of other ministries. She helped place many women in jobs after they had been trained in the Community's House of Mercy. She received countless numbers of the poor who came to her for religious instruction, advice, food, clothing, medicine, and money in the same House of Mercy. When she was refused permission because of her age to join other New York Mercys in giving service at the soldiers' hospital in Beaufort, North Carolina during the Civil War, she kept the sisters informed of the "home front" with interesting and humorous letters, while also offering them spiritual comfort in the midst of their difficult work. She visited the sick at homes and in hospitals, including Bellevue and Harlem and Blackwell Island. She threw herself wholeheartedly into fund raising and development projects to help subsidize Mercy ministries. She utilized her musical talents not only in New York, but also in Providence, Rhode Island where as early as 1851 she helped with music for its first Mercy Reception ceremony. She encouraged one of her nieces to enter and persevere in the Mercy communities of New York and Providence.¹⁷ She helped arrange Mercy vacations in Newport, Rhode Island at the summer home of her close and wealthy friend, Emily Harper. She cultivated friendships with

women religious of other communities, especially with the Sisters of Charity at Mt. St. Vincent-on-Hudson where she and other Sisters of Mercy sometimes went for rest and

several years (1864-1871). She supported several separate New York Mercy foundations extending from Worcester, Massachusetts to Eureka, California, and the establish-

In spite of the tremendous dedication she exhibited in all of these activities, her deepest love was that of prison ministry. Her community knew and remembered Catherine mainly as one who "rejoiced in the title of Prison Sister."

relaxation. She served as a consultant to Edward I. White in his publication of the first major biography of her mother. She actively supported the work of Father Isaac Hecker and his new Paulist Community. She published and circulated works of a religious nature (sometimes after translating them from French). She read extensively and wrote beautiful meditations and poems. She carried on a voluminous correspondence with relatives, members of the American Catholic hierarchy,¹⁸ and others on any number of events and issues ranging from the First Vatican Council, to Bismarck's unification of Germany, to finding a way for transporting a destitute Irish woman from New York City to a better life with her brother near Cincinnati, Ohio. She served as Assistant Mother of the community for

ment of branch houses in Greenbush and Balmsville, New York. In spite of the tremendous dedication she exhibited in all of these activities, her deepest love was that of prison ministry. Her community knew and remembered Catherine mainly as one who "rejoiced in the title of Prison Sister."¹⁹

Catherine Seton died of pneumonia and the grippe at St. Catherine's Convent of Mercy on the corner of Madison Avenue and 81st Street in New York City on April 3, 1891 at the age of almost ninety-one years. Requiem Mass was celebrated for the repose of her soul in the convent chapel on April 6 by her nephew, Monsignor Robert Seton (the future titular archbishop of Heliopolis), after which she was buried in the Sisters of Mercy lot at Calvary Cemetery on Long Island. In

eulogies and obituaries, she was lauded as the daughter of a saintly woman whose religious sisterhood had expanded remarkably after its foundation, and as a member of a family of other distinguished persons. She was hailed as one who had been well-acquainted with a long line of eminent clergy and bishops who had been among the leaders of the nineteenth-century American Catholic Church. In considering her life as a laywoman, attention was given to the prominent people she knew and the wide variety of interesting places she lived and visited. In reviewing her years as a Sister of Mercy, acknowledgment was made of her countless contributions to works of the Mercy Community, but the greatest emphasis was placed on her love for and service to the poor, the sick, and most especially to those in prison. Perhaps *The New York Catholic News* (April 5, 1891) summed up her prison work best of all in these words:

No one probably ever acquired such influence and control over the thieves and robber class of New York. Though complete reformation was seldom the reward of her zeal and prayerful labors, she was able to prevent much evil and inspire much good in the minds and hearts of this dangerous and apparently irreclaimable class. They came to her for years to seek advice and guidance, they endeavored to make her trustee for their wives and children, so implicit was their confidence in her. She would be called to

the [convent] parlor to meet at the same time some relative moving in the best circles, and perhaps some unfortunate whose steps to the convent door had been followed by a detective.²⁰

What a marvelous tribute to Catherine Josephine Seton, daughter of a saint, and the first New York Sister of Mercy! What a marvelous tribute to Catherine Josephine Seton, to a woman who certainly played a very vital role during the first forty-five years of "The New York Mercy Experience"!



Notes

1. Her life as a secular, mainly from 1800, the year of her birth, to 1821, the year of her mother's death, was treated in detail by the author in "The Early Years (1800-1821) of Catherine Josephine Seton (1800-1891): Daughter of a Saint, First New York Sister of Mercy" in the Annual Catholic Daughters of America Lecture, The Catholic University of America, Wash., D. C., April 5, 1992. It is being prepared for publication.
2. Archives of St. Joseph's Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Maryland (hereafter cited as ASJPH), 1 - 3 - 3, XI B58, Catherine Seton to Julia Scott, Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 26, 1820.
3. For information on Elizabeth Seton's will see Annabelle M. Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton, 1774-1821* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 373, n. 66. It is unclear exactly what
4. Monsignor [Robert] Seton. *An Old Family or the Setons of Scotland and America* (New York: Bretanos, 1899), 325.
5. Archives of the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind., "The Robert Seton Collection" (hereafter cited as AUND, RSC), II - I - a, Catherine Seton to Julia Scott, Philadelphia, Pa., Nov. 28, 1838.
6. Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (hereafter cited as AAB), several lengthy letters of Catherine Seton to James Roosevelt Bayley, Paris and Rome, 1842-1843. For the one with information on her single state in life, see 43A - N5, October 1, 1842.
7. ASJPH, 1 - 3 - 3, XI B63, Catherine Seton to Mother Xavier Clarke, Emmitsburg, Md., February 23, 1842.
8. ASJPH, 1 - 3 - 3, XI B64, Catherine Seton to Mother Xavier Clarke, Emmitsburg, Md., April 29, 1842.

furniture was taken by Catherine. The correspondence very probably included letters of Father Bruté to her mother. (See ASJPH, Early Correspondence, #108, Sister Catherine Seton to Mother Euphemia Blenkinsop, Emmitsburg, Md., Feb. 22, 1884.) Catherine wore her mother's wedding ring when she left Emmitsburg and continued wearing it until her death, shortly after which the New York Mercys returned it to the St. Joseph's Provinciate in Emmitsburg, where it now graces the museum honoring her mother. (See ASJPH, Early Correspondence, #41, Sister Bonaventure, R.S.M. to Mother Mariana Flynn, Emmitsburg, Md., April 20, 1891.)

9. AUND, RSC, II - 2 - n, Catherine Seton to James Roosevelt Bayley, Paris, France, March 20, 1843.
10. The "founding sisters" were: Mother Mary Agnes O'Connor (Superior); Sisters Mary Angela Maher, Mary Austin Horan, Mary Monica O'Doherty, Mary Camillus Byrne, Mary Teresa Breen (Professed Sisters); Sister Mary Vincent Haire (Novice); and, Marianne Byrne (Postulant).
11. This was the first of the New York Mercy Motherhouses. Catherine Seton lived there from 1846 until 1848. She lived at a new Motherhouse, St. Catherine's Convent of Mercy, located at the corner of Houston and Mulberry Streets from 1848 to 1885; and, she lived at another new Motherhouse, St. Catherine's Convent of Mercy, located at the corner of Madison Avenue and 81st Street from 1885 until her death in 1891. (See Archives of the Sisters of Mercy of New York [hereafter cited as ASMNY], "History of St. Catherine's, Houston Street," H 100 - 15 - 2 - 1 - 1 and "History of St. Catherine's . . . Madison Avenue," H 100 - 15 - 1 - 2 - 2.)
12. Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, Ireland, Mother Agnes O'Connor to Mother Cecilia Marmion, Dublin, Ireland. October 15, 1846.
13. AAB, 25 E 15, Bishop John Hughes to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston, Baltimore, Maryland, April 16, 1849. (Catherine Seton received the Mercy habit on April 16, 1847, and was given the name, Sister Mary Catherine.)
14. Mother M. Teresa Austin Carroll. *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy, vol. 3, Newfoundland and the United States* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1889), 171-2. (See also Helen Sweeney. *The Golden Milestone, 1846-1896* [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1896] for an overview of the first fifty years of New York Mercy history of which chapter 5 is devoted to Catherine Seton; and Katherine Burton. *His Mercy Endureth Forever* [Tarrytown, New York: Sisters of Mercy, 1946] for an overview of the first one hundred years of New York Mercy history, including various references to Catherine Seton.)
15. ASMNY, "Annals of the Sisters of Mercy of New York," 125.
16. Ibid.
17. Thus Helen Seton, daughter of Catherine's brother, William. Born in New York City in 1844 and educated at the Sacré Coeur convent in Paris, France, she entered the New York Mercy Community on January 6, 1876; she received the habit and the name of Sister Catherine (by now her aunt was known as Mother Catherine, and thus no problem with a name duplication) on Nov. 14, 1876; and she made religious profession on February 8, 1879. In 1885, she transferred to the Providence Mercy Community and received the name of Sister Angela. In 1899, she returned to the New York Mercy Community and resumed the name of Sister Catherine. She died at St. Catherine's Convent on 81st Street in New York City on Dec. 14, 1906. She is buried in the Sisters of Mercy lot at Calvary Cemetery on Long Island. (See ASMNY, A 100 - 3 - 3 - 4 and AUND, RSC, XI - 2 - j, Robert Seton to James E. Edwards, Notre Dame, Ind., Jan. 1, 1907.)
18. Some of Catherine's dealings with the American Catholic hierarchy, including those related to correspondence, were treated by the author in "Catherine Seton (1800-1891) and the Nineteenth Century American Catholic Hierarchy: Advisor, Advisee, and Friend" in a paper delivered at the History of Women Religious Conference, Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 19, 1995. It is being prepared for publication.
19. ASMNY, "Annals," 125. (Her involvement in prison ministry was treated by the author in "Catherine Seton [1800-1891]: 'Mercy Prison Sister'" in a paper delivered at the History of Women Religious Conference, Marymount College, Tarrytown, New York, June 29, 1992. It is being prepared for publication.)
20. AUND, RSC, [II - 2 - d], *The New York Catholic News* (April 5, 1891).

Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection

Janet K. Ruffing, R.S.M.

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of *Tender Courage* by Joanna Regan and Isabelle Keiss in 1988, I have been fascinated by the "Quaker Connection." Regan and Keiss framed the issue by describing Catherine McAuley's twenty year stay with the Callaghans as her "hidden life" in a Quaker household. In 1987, Carmel Bourke published her volume

assumptions were made by Americans and an Australian who have been deeply influenced by a pluralistic experience of religion in their own cultures. For Sisters of Mercy who live in religiously pluralistic cultures, to discover within the personal history of the foundress not only a prototype of religious tolerance but of ecumenism as well is

making, we discover that Friends have a longer history than do we in these processes which were modeled on those of the early church.

These possibilities excite our American imaginations but not ordinarily Irish ones,³ unless the Irish in question happen to be Quakers! And they have excited mine, especially in terms of the potential, mutual, spiritual influences that may have been part of Catherine's experience with the Callaghans. I first became aware of this radically different imaginative response to the possibility of Catherine's having been influenced by the Quakers when Angela Bolster responded in writing to some of my queries about these assumptions and then in person at a MAST meeting held in Pittsburgh. From the perspective of promoting Catherine McAuley's cause for canonization, Angela's portrayal demonstrates Catherine's absolute fidelity to her Catholicism, apparently completely uninfluenced in matters of religion by the Protestants with whom she lived. At that same time, Rita Vallade was working on her thesis which explored Quaker patterns of governance and compared them with Catherine McAuley's approach. I realized that if we continue to

Sisters of Mercy recognize an affinity with Friends in sharing similar contemplative traditions and concerns for people who are poor or oppressed.

on Catherine's spirituality, *A Woman Sings of Mercy* and, like Regan and Keiss, asserted that there was a strong Quaker influence on Catherine. Bourke assumed that the Callaghans "were religious people, Mrs. Callaghan in particular being a very devout Quaker who practiced her religion with fervor."¹ Carmel identifies several dominant themes in Quaker theology and practice which she incorporates into her portrayal of life in the Callaghan's home at Coolock House.

It is probably no accident that these reflections and as-

genuinely appealing. Further, Sisters of Mercy recognize an affinity with Friends in sharing similar contemplative traditions and concerns for people who are poor or oppressed. Finally, from a feminist desire for mutuality in relationship and participation in governance, it is reasonable to expect, given their loving and familial relationship² lasting more than twenty years, that these two women would have influenced each other in important ways. As we have grown in our own appropriation of discernment and consensual models of decision-

make assertions about Quaker influence, we had best establish what we can according to the historical record and sort out our American or Australian projections onto Irish Quakerism on the basis of what we can establish from Quaker records themselves.

Quaker Sources

To that end, I began a search of Quaker materials and records, first attempting to locate any verifiable historical link of Catherine Callaghan to the Irish Quakers. Friends maintained extensive records and consolidated their historical archives in the Religious Society of Friends Historical Library housed at Swanbrook House, Dublin. There I read the entire record of Women's Meeting Minutes from 1757–1813, and much of the Men's Meeting Minutes 1767–79, and 1789–95. In reading the records of the business meetings and in talking with the curators of the collection, I discovered that the Friends disowned members who married before a priest or who paid tithes (usually multiple offenses) for the support of clergy, either Roman Catholic or Church of Ireland. The Men's Meeting Minutes record every letter of "disunity" sent to such disowned members.

Quaker "Catherines"

In the Dublin Meeting record,⁴ there were only three "Catherines" who were dis-

owned for marriage before a priest during years that might be plausible for Catherine Callaghan. A Catharine Hunt who married outside the society before a priest was issued her notice, 23, 5 mos, 1769. There was no birth record for her in the Edenderry records (the meeting from which she transferred) that might have established her identity as Mrs. Callaghan were the date to match that in the obituary. Catherine Tracy married a Walter Knott in 1756 outside the society. If the Tracy-Knott marriage were a first marriage for Mrs. Callaghan, she would have been about seventeen when she married Walter Knott. In 1773, a Catherine

suggested that a newspaper notice of the Callaghan wedding might be the only way of identifying which, if any, of these Catherines is our Mrs. Callaghan. I have not yet heard from Frances that she has discovered anything further in those sources.

The information available from the Friends is, I believe, significant in spite of our inability to verify Catherine Callaghan's name on Quaker membership rolls. Because of her marriage before a priest or to a non-Quaker, Mrs. Callaghan would not have been able to participate fully in Quaker life throughout her nearly fifty years of marriage. The lack of birth records for

Because of her marriage before a priest or to a non-Quaker, Mrs. Callaghan would not have been able to participate fully in Quaker life throughout her nearly fifty years of marriage.

King (already married) came to the Dublin Society from Carlow. These were the only Catherines in the records except for an indigent woman, Catherine Cornwall, who was dependent on the Women's Meeting for all her needs. Sister Frances Lowe, R.S.M., who works at the National Library, suggested that with potential last names it might be possible to search the parish registers for the Callaghan marriage. Because some of those records were destroyed by fires, she

the disowned Catherines indicates that Mrs. Callaghan's parents most likely joined the Friends through conversion (or "convincement" to use their terminology). The children would have attended meetings with the parents, but would not have been listed in the birth record. Because of the disownment, there would be no death record among the Quaker archives. Mrs. Callaghan was buried in the Protestant cemetery in Coolock Village. Because she had

been baptized a Catholic without her husband's knowledge before she died, she was buried from the Church of Ireland.

Mary Nathy described some strange cloud darkening Mrs. Callaghan's life in the form of anonymous letters threatening disclosure about something connected with her marriage. Could this trouble "connected with her marriage" be her disownment by the Quakers?⁵ It seems odd to me that something so generally known about Quakers in Ireland would not have found its way into any descriptions of Mrs. Callaghan, who was so obviously known to be a Quaker.

Mercy Sources

All of the biographies⁶ that treat this period of Catherine McAuley's life identify Mrs. Callaghan as a Quaker, most

a dissenting tradition other than the Quakers.⁸ Sister M. Vincent Harnett's description of the Callaghans' reaction to Catherine's desire to fully embrace her own Catholicism after she had made an informed doctrinal and historical investigation of both Protestantism and Catholicism suggests that they both respected decisions of conscience.

It was but natural to suppose that they would have wished her to be of the same religious persuasion as themselves, but as her conscience and conviction led her otherwise, they were unwilling to exert even the smallest influence and allowed her the same freedom of choice in the matter of religion, which in similar circumstances they would have desired for themselves. She continued to go to Mass, they to Church without any diminution of their mutual esteem and affection.⁹

Many people of that time continued to worship with Friends and to consider themselves Friends, and to practise a Quaker lifestyle even though they were deprived of membership.

likely based on the Mary Ann (Anna Maria) Doyle letter: "I cannot say much of Revd. Mother's life in the world. I know she had much to contend with regarding religion, being constantly with Protestants and Quakers."⁷ It is possible that William Callaghan may actually have belonged to

Given that both Callaghans by the time Catherine lived with them attended a Protestant church occasionally, in what ways might we describe the particular effects on Catherine of living for more than twenty years with Protestants? And particularly in what ways might she have encountered

Catherine Callaghan's Quakerism?

Catherine Callaghan and the Irish Quakers

Clearly, Mrs. Callaghan must have continued to identify herself as a Quaker despite her disownment, for any mention of her Quakerism to occur at all. Potentially, as Ross Chapman wrote, "many such people of that time continued to worship with Friends and to consider themselves Friends, and to practise a Quaker lifestyle even though they were deprived of membership."¹⁰ However, it is important to recognize some of the particular features of the Society of Friends in Ireland.

My recent historical research on the Irish Quakers revealed discrepancies from contemporary generalizations commonly made about Quakers. Irish sources agree that Quaker life in Ireland in the early and mid-eighteenth century was in decline. Journals indicate that many Irish Quakers had abandoned plain dress.¹¹ The more spiritually fervent Quakers expressed concern at assimilation, reporting that Friends were involved with "drinking healths, gaming, frequenting playhouses, music meetings and other such diversion."¹² Irish Quakers were primarily of English ancestry and did not show much interest in converting the native Irish.¹³ They had accumulated considerable wealth which "led to social acceptance and pressure to identify with their Protestant

peers."¹⁴ Isabel Grubb describes an obsession with the maintenance of discipline by 1750 which "had brought the Society to a very low ebb."¹⁵ Of course, periodic revivals occurred through the ministrations of visiting Friends and from the Evangelical movement lead by Wesley which influenced the Society of Friends. But Irish Quakerism in the eighteenth century was not at its most vibrant level.

Since Irish Quakers were primarily converts from the Church of Ireland or from the Calvinistic traditions, they were unsympathetic to Irish Roman Catholics both theologically and ethnically. They were, however, less bigoted towards others than were Anglicans. Because of their own beliefs about dependence on the "Inner Light," the inward guidance of the indwelling Spirit within as the only thing religiously necessary, they opposed sacraments, creeds, rituals, and the external, material, religious culture of Roman Catholicism. Hence, the prohibition in the Callaghan household of popish objects such as crucifixes, pictures, statues, etc.¹⁶ They did not object to church attendance.

On the other hand, there were strong points of interconnection between these diverse Christian traditions. They shared the same Scripture and a desire to imitate Jesus. In spite of the religious controversies of the day, Catherine learned by living in Protestant homes that these were good people who were

often sincerely following what they believed. She had, as a result, a broader view of Christianity than that of someone who was raised within the limited confines of Catholic belief and culture alone.

Quakers recognized the authenticity of the Catholic mystical tradition. They particularly liked to read the French Quietists of the previous century, most especially Madam Guyon, but Francis

really been an essentially Catholic phenomenon . . . brought at least a small measure of appreciation of the devotional attitude of each."¹⁹ Harnett states that Catherine often "read from some book of moral or religious instruction"²⁰ to Mrs. Callaghan when she was an invalid. In addition to the Scriptures, some of these mystical writings may have been among the books read aloud.

Quakers recognized the working of the Inward Light in all men and women regardless of their particular religious traditions.

deSales as well. *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis was a volume shared by both groups. Most Quaker homes had a copy of Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*. Barclay had been reared a Calvinist, but was educated in France by Jesuits.¹⁷ Quakers recognized the working of the Inward Light in all men and women regardless of their particular religious traditions. For them, this was an experienced reality and not a matter of creed or something effected by ritual. Irish Friends consider the late eighteenth century to have been a Quietist period in their own history.¹⁸ This was a distinct contrast with the early Friends who wanted to change the world. Maurice Wigham reports that this "alignment with what had

Wigham also reports a series of first-day meetings in Dublin in which the silence was broken on only one occasion in twenty-two consecutive meetings.²¹ Worship had become less "enthusiastic" or "charismatic" by this period of time. Both Mrs. Callaghan and Catherine McAuley would have been comfortable with this deep interior, silent prayer. I also suspect that Catherine's interior life was fostered rather than hindered by the lack of devotional objects in the home. Furthermore, these friends might never have needed to speak about their interior experiences to one another, but rather simply sensed God dwelling in one another. Wigham also tells us that "the Bible was a constant source

book, and family reading after breakfast became the norm."²² A minute from the Yearly London Meeting of 1815 gives a sense of how Quakers viewed this practice.²³

It has afforded us much satisfaction to believe, that the Christian practice of daily reading in families a portion of Holy Scripture, with a subsequent pause for retirement and reflection, is increasing amongst us. We conceive that it is both the duty and the interest of those who believe in the doctrines of the gospel, and who possess the invaluable treasure of the sacred records, frequently to recur to them for instruction and consolation. We are desirous that this wholesome domestic regulation may be adopted everywhere. Heads of families, who have themselves experienced the benefit of religious instruction, will do well to consider, whether, in this respect, they have not a duty to discharge to their servants and others of their household.

Women Quakers were remarkable for their participation in this itinerant ministry in which they often traveled far beyond their region of origin.

The Bible was not, however, the only book read for devotional purposes. Quakers also read journals of traveling ministers, history, poetry, travel, and biblical studies.

Among Quakers there was a ministry of peer visitation. The Society was radically

egalitarian and non-paid ministers led by the Spirit traveled widely, visiting local meetings and individual families. These visitations included conversation about mutual concerns and usually included silent or spontaneous prayer. Among Quakers, such visitation helped keep the community gathered around similar concerns and provided mutual encouragement in the practice of their faith. This practice of visitation was a primary means of fostering individual processes of discernment undertaken with community support. Women Quakers were remarkable for their participation in this itinerant ministry in which they often traveled far beyond their region of origin. They traveled two by two in order to maintain their respectability, but in every other way they equalled the men in this ministry. Catherine McAuley certainly seemed to be aware of this

ious groups for proselytizing. Catherine McAuley was skillful at visitation, in her case, internally as a means for animating her newly founded young communities and apostolically, like the Quakers, for both instruction and encouragement in the faith. Her visitations included conversation, practical response to needs, and prayer.

According to Wigham, the Quaker ambiance pervaded the whole life of the family. Before each meal, there were always moments of quiet worship sometimes broken by prayer."²⁵ And "The problems of the household were often subject to quiet waiting and prayer rather than argument. 'The way will open' it was said, 'there will be a leading from the Spirit.'"²⁶ I wonder if Catherine McAuley might have absorbed something of this waiting on God for guidance and for the way to be shown from Mrs. Callaghan. Mercy documents describe the foundress as relying on God's providence and of having an extraordinary trust in God enabling her to move step by step in the direction she felt God wanted. The terminology is slightly different, but not the reality of discernment.

Moral Goodness

In addition to a bond in an interior way of life, Catherine was free of anti-Protestant prejudice. She experienced among the Protestants with whom she lived even prior to

Quaker practice since she is recorded as having her companion address her on the trip to England, as "friend Catherine" instead of using either any term associated with religious or her familiar nickname, "Kitty."²⁴ Visitations were also used by other relig-

the Callaghans Protestant generosity in taking in family members dependent on their charity. The Callaghans were generous beyond their immediate family and described as genuinely loving. Catherine judged people on the basis of character rather than on their membership in any particular group. She discerned good character regardless of the conditions of wealth or poverty or religious belief. She recognized that the moral goodness she witnessed in her friends and family members were authentic expressions of the religion which they practiced. Although she suffered from painful anti-Catholic verbal abuse, she attributed such statements to ignorance rather than malice. Her response was to educate, persuade, and enlighten.

Care for the Poor

The strongest link between Catherine and the Quakers may well be a shared concern for people who were poor. Mary Nathy describes Mrs. Callaghan's generosity to the poor of Coolock Village as representative of her Quaker practice.²⁷ It was not until 1822 that the Quakers initiated any large scale relief schemes.²⁸ Prior to this time, they assumed total responsibility for their own poor, usually through the local Women's Meeting,²⁹ while individual Quakers extended help to some people beyond their own community. During

the Great Famine, Quakers as a group responded to desperate need with great generosity without using their relief efforts as means of coercing conversion.

In addition, in the Ireland of Catherine's day, some activities were determined solely by gender. The poor, sometimes called "cottagers" who lived in villages or on the land near the large manor houses and estates, were the responsi-

cipal protagonist, against whom the cottager, Margaret, argues her understandings of Catholic practice and teaching. Not only is Catherine's direct experience of caring for the poor a result of her sharing responsibilities for the Callaghan household, but there are Quaker versions of this genre, in which two women discuss a number of topics related to moral behavior, parenting, and other

The strongest link between Catherine and the Quakers may well be a shared concern for people who were poor.

bility of the lady of the house, who actually saw to the management of the entire estate, grounds as well as the household. Such was Mrs. Callaghan's position as mistress of Coolock House. However, as she grew more frail, Catherine acted as her surrogate in the charity she offered in her friend's name. She visited the families and saw both their ignorance and their poverty. When Catherine McAuley "initiated a crusade for the unfortunate" she attracted the competitive jealousy of the local vicar's wife who tried to outdo her in charity.³⁰

Anyone familiar with Catherine McAuley's *Cottage Controversies*, immediately recognizes the vicar's wife as the model for Lady P__, the prin-

practical topics. The Quakers carefully omitted all sectarian themes from their tracts so that their distribution would not be proscribed by either the Catholics or the Anglicans.³¹ Catherine used the same genre creatively as a catechetical tool.

Mary Nathy describes Catherine as not only distributing provisions, but spending hours listening to the villagers, instructing and consoling them. Catholics were frequently employed on the estates as servants, footmen, coachmen, gardeners, etc. Many of these retainers lost employment when the country estates were closed because the gentry moved to London where the new social scene unfolded after the Act of Union. Quaker sources indicate

serious commitment to care for needy persons. The Dublin Yearly Meeting of 1800 exhorted:

a loving concern was felt to excite friends to come up in the practice of what we ought to be—humble self-denying followers of Christ—that our lives and conduct might be brought to this standard—and in a particular manner that we might be engaged to relieve the distresses of our fellow-creatures by affording them the means of obtaining a comfortable livelihood for themselves; by visiting the sick and afflicted in their habitations, by promoting the education of their poor, neglected children, and by doing our part to render their situation altogether as comfortable as we would others should do to us were we in a similar situation.

Historically, this approach was adopted by the Dublin Quakers shortly before the Callaghans moved out to Coolock House. It is extraordinarily similar to Catherine's interpretation of the works of mercy which she practiced long before she opened the house of mercy. Quakers did not proselytize the recipients of their charity, and they responded to absolute need regardless of religion, class, or political alignments.

A point of divergence occurs, however, in attention to the social causes of human misery. Catherine McAuley did not develop any form of social analysis or social criticism similar to that which was evolving among the Quakers during the time she was associated with the Callaghans. A Quaker woman, Catherine Phillips, who traveled in both Ireland and America, published *Considerations on the Causes of the High Price of Grain* in 1792.

Phillips offered a detailed analysis of why the prices went up and stayed up, tracing the deprivation of the poor to the increasing penchant for luxury among the rich and middle classes. The seeds of poverty and violence, she believed, were sown in the taste for luxury . . . She then proposed a detailed and carefully constructed land-use policy, addressing . . . the needs of all concerned parties.³²

By 1827, Elizabeth Fry and her brother Joseph Gurney who were horrified at the conditions in prisons and charitable institutions reproached the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland: "To preserve the poor from starvation, it is a duty which appears to devolve not only on the benevolence of individuals, but in case of absolute need, on

the justice of the whole community."³³

These citations from Quakers contemporary with Catherine McAuley reveal a more radical social or systemic analysis of the causes of poverty than Catherine herself ever suggested in writing.

Although Catherine chose to live frugally, she did not connect this choice as a way of redistributing resources among social classes. She often seems more intent on religious instruction and on securing salvation in the next life as much as she sought to relieve suffering in the present life. She was preoccupied with the loss of one's soul if one died unbaptized or unrepentant. She does not appear to envision the possibility of social change nor does she concretely promote it. She does not seem to imagine a step beyond rescuing the victims of various forms of injustice.

Likewise, she does not reflect on the effects of bigotry as an ideology which fosters hatred, anger, and scapegoating, leading to both civil and domestic violence. Religious bigotry was so violent in her milieu that she literally risked her own financial security by broaching the possibility of conversion and baptism to Mrs. Callaghan, and her life when her brother-in-law discovered that both his daughter and wife had become Roman Catholics. Catherine responds in a non-violent manner, but does not appear to reflect on the interrelationships among all of the factors

Although Catherine chose to live frugally, she did not connect this choice as a way of redistributing resources among social classes.

involved. Although Catherine lived before the first great papal social encyclicals appeared influencing Catholics in relationship to social justice issues, the Quakers already had begun to analyze the causes of poverty and the oppression of the poor as well as to seek social changes which would make temporary relief unnecessary.

Despite this lack of social analysis in Catherine McAuley and perhaps in Mrs. Callaghan as well, I, nonetheless, want to assume that there was a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing spiritual or religious influence in the Callaghan household. Were that not the case, I doubt that the Callaghans would have been open to Catherine's invitation to embrace the Catholic faith on their deathbeds. Although neither of the Callaghans entirely "practiced" their respective religions if measured by church attendance, they were both good people who loved others despite their economically comfortable lives. They both respected conscience and were religious in their own way. They were both generous to the poor and entirely willing to support Catherine's plans to relieve the needs of poor women. They shared their lives and their resources with Catherine in a mutually loving relationship, although she no doubt felt her lesser social position resulting from her dependence on their benevolent generosity.

Conclusion

I do not believe that much more can be retrieved about a direct Quaker connection for Catherine McAuley through

Catherine McAuley freely moved across the Protestant-Catholic divisions in Ireland and England.

Mrs. Callaghan. Catherine McAuley had become convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith when she resolved her religious doubts about whether or not she could embrace the Protestant faith which most of her family shared. Once convinced through an intellectual process rather than a devotional one, she seemed to question only specific Catholic customs or cultural practices rather than anything related to the understanding of Catholicism in her day. There are, though, wonderful convergences, similarities, and actions related to the Quakers which have subsequently become part of Mercy life and practice as a result of developments in Catholic social teaching, ecumenism, and the evolution of apostolic religious life.

A more fruitful line of research might be to trace in Ireland, England, and America concrete intersections between the Sisters of Mercy and Quakers from the first foundations to the present. For instance, Quakers made contri-

butions to the works of mercy organized by the sisters at Kinsale.³⁴ Quakers developed methods of non-violent theory in the early twentieth century through direct contact with

Ghandi. This mutual influence later supported Sister of Mercy efforts in the U.S. when they often joined with Friends in social justice activities in various parts of the country from the late 1960s on.

Catherine McAuley freely moved across the Protestant-Catholic divisions in Ireland and England. As she organized the House of Mercy and other works, she studied all of the available models. She inspected the Kildare Society Schools, uncovering their methods of proselytizing. The most stunning direct influence on her of Quaker concern for the poor was the Lancastrian educational system. Joseph Lancaster (1778-1839) pioneered a method of education in the slums of London. In 1801, he

opened a school, promising to educate all children who wished to come to him freely, if they were too poor to pay the tuition, or for a small fee where the parents had the means for it. Not having any source of income from which to pay assistants, Lancaster hit upon the plan of employing older pupils to teach the

younger ones. This system of pupil instructors, guided by Lancaster's native aptitude for teaching and gift for winning the confidence and affection of the children, succeeded even beyond the enthusiast's expectation.³⁵

When Catherine organized her own schools, she studied Lancaster's successes and failures and modified his system in ways which were extremely successful in Ireland. Mercy sources do not make this particular Quaker connection explicit. Mary Sullivan characterized it as:

a modified system wherein senior girls served, under the direction of the sister-teachers, as monitresses who heard the recitations in secular subjects and corrected the written assignments of small groups of younger children. This was the method generally following many of the early Mercy schools, there being too few sisters to handle the complete instruction of the hundreds of children who attended each school . . . According to Courtney, the monitresses from "the beginning were paid by the community even during the hard years of the Famine" and Saturday classes in singing, drawing, and piano were provided to them. They, in turn, if they "aspired to be governesses," gave piano lessons in the school where "there was a piano for lessons and also one for practice."³⁶

This modified Lancastrian system revolutionized education for poor children in Ireland once the penal laws were repealed and poor Catholic

children could receive an education. Although there were limitations to the depth and scope of education provided in those early years, nonetheless, education made a significant difference both to the children served and to society.

I suggest that many more such influences and connections might be discovered were Mercy scholars to do the careful historical work which alone justifies accurate claims about such influences and connections. There is a truth in the imaginative leap some of us have made to Catherine's Quaker connection. It may say more about us than about Catherine. It may say more about what we are becoming than about how Catherine understood her own situation.



Notes

1. Carmel Bourke, *A Woman Sings of Mercy* (Sydney: Dwyer, 1987) 25.
2. Mary Nathy, *Catherine McAuley: Mercy Foundress*, (Dublin: Veritas, 1979) identifies William Callaghan as a distant relation of the McAuley family. She places the Callaghan's return from India in 1785, indicating that he made his fortune in India. They were in India about twenty years where there was not yet an active community of Friends. Mrs. Callaghan's experience of membership would thus have been prior to about 1765 and after 1785 until she became an invalid toward the end of her life.
3. Angela Bolster characterizes the religiosity of the Callaghans thus: "William Callaghan was a non-practicing Anglican; his wife, a non-practicing Quaker. After-dinner raillery against Catholics occurred frequently in their home." "Catherine McAuley: From the Edges of History to the Center of Meaning" *MAST Journal* 6 (Spring, 1996) 1.
4. The Callaghans seemed to be so associated with Dublin society that it did not occur to me to look beyond Quaker Dublin to records such as those for Cork or Carlow.
5. Nathy, 3. Ross Campbell, a Quaker correspondent who went to look for traces of Mrs. Callaghan in the Friends Historical Library after having read Carmel Bourke's book, thinks this "cloud" refers to something more serious than disownment from the Quakers. (Personal correspondence, 23 July 1997.)
6. Austin Carroll, Roland Savage, Mary Nathy, Bertrand Deignan.
7. Mary Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 43, To Mary Augustine Moore, 1844 (All citations and references to early manuscript sources are from this edition. Hereafter, CMTM.)
8. Mary Augustine Moore identifies Catherine McCauley's brother-in-law as a dissenter even though he occasionally went to the Anglican Church. CMTM, 199.
9. Limerick MS, CMTM, 143.
10. Ross Campbell of Newry, personal correspondence, 12 December 1996.

11. Isabel Grubb, *Quakers in Ireland 1654–1900* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1927) 125.
12. Yearly Meeting Minutes, iii. mo, 1751. Cited by Richard S. Harrison, "Spiritual Perception and the Evolution of the Irish Quakers," in *The Religion of Irish Dissent 1650–1800*, ed. Kevin Herlihy (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1996) 79.
13. Harrison, 70.
14. Harrison, 81.
15. Grubb, 87.
16. Roland Burke Savage, *Catherine McAuley: The First Sister of Mercy* (Dublin: Gill, 1949) 31.
17. Harrison, 72.
18. Maurice Wigham, *The Irish Quakers*, (Dublin: Historical Committee of the Society of Friends: 1992) 54.
19. Wigham, 55.
20. Harnett, Limerick MS, CMTM, 145.
21. Wigham, 50.
22. Wigham, 48.
23. Although this minute was adopted in London and not in Ireland, the Irish Quakers remained dependent on the English. There was frequent visitation of Irish meetings by both English and American Quakers. This statement appears to be representative among the communities in general. There are Irish minutes which advocate and encourage this practice.
24. Letter to Sister M. Elizabeth Moore—St. Mary Convent, Limerick, written from Bermondsey, December 17, 1839. "We . . . arrived in Liverpool at half past six next morning, were conducted to the Mersey Hotel where breakfast was ready—laughed and talked over the adventures of the night, particularly my travelling [sic] title, changed from your Kitty to friend Catherine, an improvement, you will say." *Letters of Catherine McAuley 1827–1841* ed. Sister Mary Ignatia Neumann, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 185.
25. Wigham, 46.
26. Wigham, 47.
27. Early Irish Quakers recorded explicit advice warning against oppressing the poor: "Advised that all friends be careful not to oppress the poor in any respect." Minute of the Yearly Dublin Meeting, 1695.
28. John Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters, Vol 1, Friends and Relief* (York: Sessions, 1975) 26.
29. The record of these meetings for Dublin included the following themes: 1) report on changes and needs among those on the poor list 2) reading and sending proceedings to others meetings 3) appointment of members to visit the poor, ill, or potential members 4) receiving certificates from the sending meetings for women who moved to Dublin or came as visiting ministers 5) decisions about taking care of the needs of non-Quaker poor 6) frequently noting poor attendance at these meetings 7) child-rearing advice 8) comments on the effect of visiting friends on the gathered group both positively or negatively 9) records of disbursement of funds for the poor, requests for additional funds from the men's meeting, arranging for nurse attendants and 10) disciplinary matters. On the whole the women rarely censured other members.
30. Nathy, 4.
31. For instance, see *Cottage Dialogues among the Irish Peasantry* by Mary Leadbetter (Dublin: Kennedy, 1841). Isabel Grubb reports the Tract Association started in 1815 as the first organized form of philanthropy. She asserts its purpose is to distribute "such publications as may tend to promote Morality and Religion, or at least may occupy the time and engage the attention from reading that which may have an opposite tendency" (137).
32. Margaret Benefiel and Rebecca Phipps, "Practical Mysticism: Quakers and Social Transformation" essay to be published in a forthcoming volume on *Mysticism and Social Transformation*, ed. Janet Ruffing.
33. Cited by Greenwood, 27.
34. Frank Hurley, *St. Joseph's Convent of Mercy, Kinsale: A Celebration of 150 Years! 1844–1994*, "During the Famine food was provided twice daily for children and adults. Donations poured in from the Society of Friends—the Quakers, from Father Matthew and from Rome and America." 11.
35. Rufus Jones, *Later Periods of Quakerism*, Vol 1 (London: Macmillan, 1921) 677.
36. Mary Sullivan, CMTM, 132.

Catherine McAuley

Going to the Threshold for Mercy

Neil J. Draves-Arpaia, M.Div.

THE THEME OF THIS conference, "Catherine McAuley: A Cloak of Many Colors," reminded me of something I read in *Peripheral Visions*, by Mary Catherine Bateson, a professor of anthropology and English at George Mason University. Bateson, who is Margaret Mead's daughter, writes:

Many tales have more than one meaning. It is important not to reduce understanding to some narrow focus, sacrificing multiplicity to what might be called the rhetoric of merely.¹

Imaging Catherine McAuley as a cloak of many colors suggests a diversity of visions about someone whose immediate influence positively impacted the impoverished social conditions in early nineteenth-century Ireland. It also suggests the tremendous possibilities that are still before us for fostering a richer appreciation for Catherine McAuley. I hope that my contribution to the conversation about Catherine McAuley will in some small way help rescue her from the sacrificial altar of being "merely" a nineteenth-century Irish nun.

This enhancing effort, so to speak, presents any historian, biographer or commentator with special challenges. One immediate task is to care-

fully scrutinize Catherine's life or legacy, beyond the aspects that already stand in bold relief, to discern critical aspects that may only be visible peripherally such as its political implications and dimensions. For example, Mother Austin Carroll's *Life of Catherine McAuley* devotes a chapter to the presence and influence of Daniel O'Connell, the Irish Liberator, in the life and mission of the Sisters of Mercy. It states that O'Connell frequently visited Convents of Mercy on his travels through Ireland. These were more than courtesy or social calls. O'Connell "addressed" the children in the schools, and Catherine herself often referred to O'Connell, sometimes reading from some of his personal letters.² Despite the fact that Carroll makes a point of saying that Catherine did not meddle in politics³ and that she even instructed the sisters that religious were to disengage from conversing about it, Catherine obviously kept herself informed about human realities.⁴ This will be a critical consideration if Catherine's life and work are to speak to contemporary audiences where political, economic, and global issues are a part of daily discourse. Of course, politics in Catherine's day was a frequent cause of

violent ruptures in Irish social life and one can see why she would discourage involvement in political discourse.

Another task is to present Catherine's qualities and contributions in such a way that she holds relevance to a wide range of people from all walks of life. This means searching for ways to endear her, say, to contemporary males just as she was in her life-time dear to individuals like William Callaghan, Daniel O'Connell or to the many Irish ecclesiastics. It also means finding ways to endear her to married and single women just as she was significant in the life of her sister, Mary, Catherine Callaghan, Mrs. O'Connell, or Miss Louisa Costello.

In speaking of Catherine McAuley, one also needs to exercise caution. Austin Carroll's biography recalls an incident that occurred shortly after the dedication of the House of Mercy chapel, 1829. A priest, who was not in favor of Catherine's new project, wrote her a contemptuous and demeaning letter which brought Catherine to tears. It reports that a few days later the priest dropped dead in the street which was seen by some as divine retribution. Catherine, of course, was her magnanimous self and spoke of the clergyman's good intentions and

had him remembered in prayers.⁵

My approach is eclectic. It is partly biographical, partly interpretive and partly theological. First, I want to present a historical cameo of Catherine as a risk-taker. I believe this is a relevant pursuit in a culture, such as ours, that is a conglomerate of perennial pioneers or venturesome types, on the one hand, and staunch comfort seekers, on the other. In this way, I hope Catherine's story both appeals and challenges.

Second, Catherine repeatedly showed her own zealous missionary spirit, which I conjecture was part of her resistance to enclosure. I will offer some thoughts about the missionary dimension of the Mercy charism and its implication for ourselves as churchpersons.

The third perspective I will introduce here is that Catherine fostered a community of allies united in compassionate service. I believe this also holds relevance at a historical moment where supremacy is a tired idea and closed systems are increasingly failing.

In the introduction to *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, Sister Mary C. Sullivan notes that Catherine founded an "enduring movement."⁶ To speak of Catherine as having initiated a movement places a slightly different, but significant, nuance on her life. In one sense, it can be said that Catherine initiated a certain type of women's movement, that is, a movement un-

dertaken by women religious for women, children, and the sick poor regardless of age or gender. In another sense, it can also be demonstrated that Catherine initiated an ecclesial movement that was inclusive of both women and men—for women, men, and children—with the nucleus of this movement being the Sisters of Mercy. In order to develop this latter aspect, it is necessary to see Catherine's work as part of a whole scenario, a collaborative effort, or a movement within a movement that was simultaneously ecclesial and political. Just as one person does not a procession make, neither does one person constitute a movement. While the core group who joined in and furthered Catherine's vision was mainly women religious, by no means was it only nuns.

Going to Thresholds

The first time I heard Sister Angela Bolster speak about Catherine McAuley was at the McAuley Conference held in November, 1995, at St. Xavier's University, Chicago. At that time Sister Angela described Catherine's life in two phases: her hidden (or marginal) years and the *ad limina* years. She defined *ad limina* as "going to the threshold." As I reflected upon Sister's Angela's presentation I found that going to the threshold was a central action in Catherine's life and for accomplishing the works of mercy. *Ad limina* was both figurative and literal. On

the literal side, going to the threshold occurred in the concrete circumstances and events in Catherine's life. Here are some examples.

The first incident involved a young servant girl that Catherine was unable to save from some form of sexual victimization by the son of her male employer. The young woman brought her predicament to Catherine's attention at the time when Catherine was living with the Callaghans. This problem was not uncommon since many domestics came from the country to work in Dublin. They were rarely offered lodging with their employer and their minimal salary forced them to seek sleeping accommodations in places that were not the best.

Catherine was deeply affected by the plea of the young woman and personally appealed to the Irish Sisters of Charity to give this young woman safe lodging. The accounts note that an admissions committee comprised of seculars was responsible for these decisions and the committee wasn't scheduled to meet for another two weeks. Catherine went so far as to plead for them to take the young woman in. Her attempts failed. The young woman returned to her morally imperiled situation and Catherine never saw her again.

This incident so affected Catherine that it even disturbed her sleep.⁷ As a result of her failure to secure safe lodging for this person, she decided that at some future

date she would do what she could to provide safe lodging to women and that *her threshold would provide quick response to the very best of its ability*; quantitative limitations understood. It also made Catherine very determined not to place such decisions in the hands of a non-resident or external committee. This decision was later reinforced when she visited the Convent of the Irish Sisters of Charity as she concretized her own plans for Baggot Street during its building phase.⁸

The points I wish to make here are two-fold. First, the issue was not about the involvement of seculars per se in the works of mercy undertaken by Catherine. The issue is a *non-resident* committee deciding matters pertaining to the ministrations of a house of refuge. It is important to keep in mind that Catherine arrived at this decision while she was, technically, a laywoman herself. One can easily see that this was more than a practical concern; it was also a pastoral and human concern. The second point is that it provides a picture of Catherine going to the threshold of the Sisters of Charity on behalf of a young woman.

A second noteworthy incident occurred after Catherine became the heiress of the Callaghan estate. She had begun to devote herself to the instruction of poor girls at St. Mary's School, Abbey Street, Dublin.⁹ This had not been an easy time for Catherine since

one family illness after another demanded her energies. Nevertheless, Catherine initiated her plan of opening a social service center to assist young women and to offer instruction to poor children. To gain insight into the best teaching materials of the day, Catherine visited reputable institutions sponsored by the Kildare Place Society, a government subsidized educational service for the poor.

In these schools, she encountered many poor Catholic children who were being brainwashed against Catholicism. Presuming Catherine to be Protestant, the personnel at the Kildare School even shared with her their methods of undermining Catholic faith. Catherine made it a point to find out the names and addresses of the Catholic children and then personally visited their homes to alert parents to the pending opening of the Baggot Street Poor School where children would receive religious instruction as well as the educational advantages provided in the Kildare Street Schools.

The *Annals of . . . Sisters of Mercy, St. Joseph's, Tullamore*¹⁰ reports this incident in such a way that is hard not to see the political dimensions of Catherine's action of starting up a school under Catholic auspices:

she [Catherine McAuley] did not disdain to attend the schools of the Kildare Street Society which was then, as now, a very hotbed of Protestantism and Proselytism.

This must have been an heroic act for one whose strong faith and indomitable courage urged her on to the great work of *defeating the machinations of a hostile Government in its wiles of poisoning youth* . . .¹¹ [italics added.]

Again, there is a point worth noting in this event. Recognizing the "machinations" and the consequences, Catherine went out of her way to inform the parents of what was happening to their children and that there was another option forthcoming. Certainly, she could have done nothing, but the fact remains that once she had this first-hand information, she did something about it both immediately and remotely.

The third telling incident occurred during the time of the cholera epidemic in Dublin in 1832. The *Bermondsey Manuscript* notes that Catherine McAuley "had a natural dread of contagion" yet "overcame the feeling and scarcely left the hospital."¹² It's not clear if Catherine's natural dread of contagion was strictly for herself or for the Sisters in general. The fear was not unrealistic given the fact that there was no common inoculation against the disease and a contagious illness, such as cholera, could have easily wiped out a fledgling community. At any rate, Catherine and the Sisters ministered to the cholera patients at the Townsend Street Hospital from April through December, 1832.

The poor, who were the most affected by the cholera,

resisted going for treatment at the hospitals because they heard it rumored that the poor were poisoned to death or buried alive. Consequently, these persons often concealed their illness, which meant that the disease went untreated and spread more quickly. *Mercy Unto Thousands* states that Catherine assured one poor individual that the "walking nuns" would be at the Townsend St. Hospital "every day, all day, as long as the cholera lasted."¹³ Catherine obviously overcame her dread to such an extent that she even returned to the House of Mercy with an infant whose mother had died.¹⁴ Again, the profile we are given shows a woman who went to the threshold of her own fears and moved beyond them for the sake of mercy. It also demonstrates a teaching she passed on to the novices, "*Abundant opportunities of self-conquest will present themselves.*"¹⁵

Each of these isolated pictures presents a particular contour of Catherine's call to mercy, namely, that it was *risk-taking*. In the first story, Catherine's sleep (comfort) was disturbed; even her dreams were not immune to the demands of compassion and the pressing needs of others. To follow in Catherine's footsteps, is to risk our personal comfort. In the second story, Catherine risks her reputation as well as social acceptance inasmuch as she takes a *political* action by pointing out the treachery of a state-subsidized project to de-

stroy Catholicism. In the third story, Catherine and her colleagues risk their own health by actively nursing the sick with a contagious disease.

Mission to the Marginated

An important consideration in this legacy is that by going to the threshold for Mercy, Catherine was simultaneously withdrawing more and more from the "mainstream" life of Dublin. We sometimes think that this was the result of having become a nun and the accompanying demands of being the superior and a foundress. While conventual religious life played its part, another primary reason for Catherine's withdrawal from the "mainstream" was that she increasingly spent much of her time in the margins with the poor, either those who came to Baggot Street or in

The church's mission is pervaded by the sense that in the neighbor or stranger whom we greet with a cup of cold water or stand with in resistance to oppressive power, solidarity with Christ is being forged. The focus is not on Jesus alone in a sort of Jesus-ology, but in looking with him in the same direction toward the inclusive well-being of the body of Christ, that is, all suffering and questing people.¹⁶

Looking in the direction toward suffering humanity in the hope of fostering human and spiritual flourishing is the initial step in any missionary endeavor. Catherine took this step repeatedly, so much so, that by the end of her life her shoes were worn out. This in itself serves as a type of final reminder, along with her request to be buried in the earth, that her pathways chose poverty as the preferable way to be in true solidarity with persons who are poor.

By going to the threshold for Mercy, Catherine was simultaneously withdrawing more and more from "mainstream" life.

their own environment. In a way, Catherine's earlier marginal life also prepared her to live among the margined who had been imprisoned on the fringes of society by generations of oppression. Elizabeth Johnson states in *She Who Is*:

Catherine's example, I believe, establishes a missionary call at the heart of the Mercy charism. This missionary call involves not only teaching and proclaiming the kerygmatic message of the gospel; it also involves building up the relationships of believers between themselves

and the larger human-cultural context in which this ecclesial community exists. Certainly Catherine invested her energies in both dimensions particularly by educating women for the good of society.

At the 1991 NCCB Symposium on *The Church: Salvation and Mission*, Bishop Francis George noted a feature of a missionary church which Catherine lived, and lived well:

Churches are cultural systems, tissues of culturally mediated relationships and networks of culturally conditioned actions. When relationships are extended and when actions unite across cultural boundaries, new ways of understanding develop. Inculturating the faith locally can increase sensitivity to possible new horizons for Christian unity. It can also open new horizons for human unity.¹⁷

Catherine's life opened new horizons for both Christian and human unity. The Derry Large Manuscript notes that in 1828, both "*Protestants and Catholics of the best fashion came in great numbers [to Baggot Street] to see the children at dinner and Daniel O'Connell, Esq., then Member of Clare, who has ever been a benefactor to our institution,*" carve the dinner.¹⁸ Also, the Limerick Manuscript provides a picture of Catherine seeking to restore church unity, in this case in Birr, 1840:

[Catherine's] exertions were most unsurpassing to withdraw the people from the Schism which had unhap-

pily disturbed the peace of that town. Almighty God blessed her efforts most wonderfully, and she had the consolation to see numbers restored to their lawful pastors, who had obstinately held out for so long a time against all efforts made for their conversion.¹⁹

As for fostering human unity, Catherine was ingenious. In a letter to Frances Warde written from Limerick, 1838, Catherine states, "*Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to when possible.*"²⁰ Her attitude, obviously far from rigid and unyielding, reveals a woman who was open to "local culture" and sought to meet people on their terms for the greater good. In Austin Carroll's biography, a lengthy footnote extols Catherine's ability "*to be perfectly at home*" amidst the cultural diversity of Ireland.²¹ These fragments strongly suggest that Catherine not only had the type of personality, but also an attitude and style that were conducive to uniting people and transcending cultural, religious, and class differences. Having certain natural abilities or acquired skills is one thing, using them effectively is another. Her encouraging poems, consoling and affirming letters, or her levity during recreation are only further examples of Catherine's efforts to promote an oasis of unity in the midst of Dublin, an oasis of unity between wealthy and poor persons throughout Ireland and beyond. After all, Mercy hospi-

talities has to do with a lot more than simply tea.

Perhaps I should point out the differences between being isolated, mainstream, and marginal. Isolation implies disconnected or cut-off, like being quarantined, sequestered or cloistered. This is not something Catherine chose for herself or the community. Mainstream implies being part and parcel of the status quo. This clearly was not Catherine's lifestyle. Marginal implies the fringes or the peripheries where generally lots of exciting, creative, and powerful opportunities lay in wait and where horizons are seen in their fullness. It can also be a lonely and painful place, a place of neglect and need, the most suitable place for mercy. This was Catherine's home. Consequently, I find that Catherine's life invites critical reflection particularly for any who seek to build on her charisma and draw new life from her legacy. Are we, like she, ready to pull up whatever stakes are driven into the status quo of social and ecclesial life and relocate to the margins? It's a disconcerting question, I realize, but one that has tremendous potential for generating new life.

A New Eco-System of Compassion

Catherine's journey into the margins was not a "hit or miss" un-thought-out venture. She just didn't pull up stakes one morning and head down the

road without a basic plan in her head. She may not have known the whole plan, but she did have an agenda. In the process, she consulted numerous people. She went out of her way to acquire necessary skills. She discerned what contacts and friendships would be important to maintain and new ones to be sought out. She prayed and trusted. It was all part of going to the threshold.

Consequently, Catherine was one of those gifted leaders who is like a scenario-planner. She continuously re-adjusted her filter to let in more and more information about the world around her. To accomplish this she provided for herself a constant stream of rich, diverse, and thought-provoking information; much of which was generated by people who were marginal to early nineteenth-century Dublin life, though from our historical perspective they appear otherwise. And, a major contributor to this rich stream was the lived reality of the poor, sick, and ignorant.

This diverse information enabled Catherine to make sound decisions. To assure that the stream was rich, Catherine embarked upon creating a new *eco-system of compassion*, a community of allies, who would have the potential for seeing the larger picture and what role they could realistically fulfill in it on behalf of the poor and to the personal sanctification of the members in it. Here I want to identify some of these key allies who were not Sisters of Mercy.

First, there is Catherine's friend and spiritual mentor, Redmond O'Hanlon, O.D.C., who for years, even after Catherine's death, served the Sisters of Mercy in varying capacities throughout Ireland.²² Dr. Michael Blake was another staunch supporter who encouraged Catherine to build on Baggot Street, personally contributed money to it and encouraged vocations to the new community. Later, as Bishop of Dromore, he wrote to Catherine, *"...and with you and all the holy members of the Order I return my most fervent thanks to God for its happy increase and diffusion . . ."*²³

Additionally there were Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, who supported Catherine in securing papal approval of the Rule and Dean Myles Gaffney, who is considered to be the author of a public posthumous tribute to Catherine that states, *"How short the time, but how numerous and how wonderful the works of that mighty mind, of that expensive heart!"*²⁴

Also, in the beginning there were the "secular" ladies, the Costigans and Costellos who taught in the school. Nor can we forget to mention those women who came forward with bequests that launched so many apostolates, such as Elizabeth Pentony in Tullamore, Mary Clanchy French in Charleville, and the poor old cook, who refused to identify herself when she sent Catherine a hundred pounds. These directly and indirectly

are all part of the movement, the eco-system of compassion.

On the eve of the new millennium, it's apparent that an entirely new eco-system is being birthed. Creating cooperating communities of compassion is vital to survival. Being a strong member of this eco-system is more viable than trying to be the dominator or definer of the overall vision of the world community. In Catherine and the Sisters of Mercy and their associates, there are plentiful examples to encourage us to go forward as part of this new reality. Yet it requires an uneasy shift and lots of risks.

It opens us to the potential loss of friends and benefactors. It may mean enduring the criticism and rejection of some church people and authorities. It may entail abandoning some of our cherished institutions that were more suitable to the "old habitat." (Coolock must be sold out of deference for Baggot Street!). It foreseeably includes re-evaluating everything about ourselves from how we appear in public, where we appear in public, what connections we make, what priorities we hold individually and in common, right down to our "God" language.

Conclusion

As Sisters and associates, we have a particular obligation to allow Catherine's legacy to inspire our own collaborative venture as an Institute in the works of mercy and justice

required by our times. The Spirit of Mercy that animated Catherine can empower us to be more attentive to the women and men who are victims of contemporary forms of sexual exploitation. The Spirit of compassion can strengthen us to take action against the cultural forces that seek to undermine the faith of youth. The consoling Spirit can enable us to face courageously the very possibility of our own diminishment as we move on our knees from bed to bed, or heart to heart, or soul to soul because the poor are still being plagued by racism, sexism, and political systems diseased by their own greed and apathy. Mercy can take us, as it did of Catherine McAuley, to thresholds we cannot now imagine. Most of all, the same vitalizing Spirit can enable the Mercy community to be driving force in a community of allies committed to compassionate service that preludes the reign of heaven.



Notes

1. Mary Catherine Bateson, *Peripheral Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 11.
2. Mary Austin Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1866 ed.), Chapter XIII, pp. 145–147. Note: Title page identifies the author as ‘A Member of the Order of Mercy’ and not by name.
3. Ibid., 147.
4. Ibid., 179.
5. Carroll, *Life*, 154–155.
6. Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1995), 4.
7. *The Limerick Manuscript* reprinted in Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 145.
8. *The Derry Large Manuscript* reprinted in Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 46.
9. *The Limerick Manuscript* identifies St. Mary’s Parish on Abbey Street; *The Derry Large Manuscript* and *The Bermondsey Manuscript* identify St. Mary’s Chapel on Liffey Street, Dublin.
10. St. Joseph’s, Tullamore, was the first foundation made from Baggot St., 1836, with Sr. Mary Ann Doyle as its first superior. Mary Ann (Anna Maria) Doyle was Catherine’s partner from the opening of Baggot St.
11. *The Annals of . . . Sisters of Mercy, St. Joseph’s, Tullamore* reprinted in Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 72.
12. *The Bermondsey Manuscript* reprinted in Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 112.
13. Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands*, 146. Degnan does not cite the source of this statement.
14. Letter of Mary Clare (Georgiana) Moore to Mary Clare Augustine Moore, August 26, 1845, reprinted in Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 97–98.
15. Mary Teresa Purcell, *Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*, ed. by Sisters of Mercy, Albany, NY (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 81.
16. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroads, 1992), 162.
17. Francis E. George, O.M.I., “The Church and Cultures,” in *A Church for All Peoples*, Eugene LaVerdiere, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 68.
18. Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 50.
19. Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 187.
20. Ibid., *Letter #79*, 73–75.
21. Carroll, *Life*, 330.
22. See Appendix I, Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 334–340 for a lengthy discussion on Redmond O’Hanlon, O.D.C.
23. Bolster, *Correspondence, Letter #166*, 173.
24. See, Tribute of Very Rev. Dean Myles Gaffney, in Sullivan, R.S.M., *McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 126–127, especially footnote #48, pp. 364–365.

An Invitation to Resymbolize Our Lady of Mercy

Elizabeth McMillan, R.S.M.

Introduction

THE SIGNS OF A resymbolization of Mary the Mother of God that are emerging within the context of the "new evangelization" in Latin America present us, Sisters of Mercy, with a challenge to resymbolize, "re-present" Our Lady of Mercy to each other and to the people with whom we associate in ministry.

I have been teaching philosophy and theology in the seminary of a new Guatemalan missionary society dedicated to Mary for over 5 years. From my first days in Guatemala, I had been impressed with how strong and vital is Marion spirituality, not only among the seminarians, but in the Guatemalan church. Later I came to realize, as the *Puebla* documents note, that indeed the spirituality of the entire Latin American church is profoundly Marion. They cherish Mary's images, shrines, and processions, and have great faith in her capacity to effect miraculous solutions to their problems.

When I inherited the Mariology course a couple of years ago, I welcomed the opportunity to do it because it would give me an opportunity to "rediscover" Mary. As the students and I have been reacting to various images of

Mary, created by artists over the centuries, I became more and more aware of how absolutely fundamental is our way of *picturing* her and symbolizing her. The students, like us, all have their favorite image of her, but virtually all of them related to her as a simple woman, unadorned by jewels and crown, who walked with the people, the poor struggling folk.

and feminist consciousness. As we seek to articulate a common Christian understanding of Jesus Christ and his church, an unavoidable question is Mary's role in salvation, for Catholics a vital dimension of Christology and ecclesiology. The feminist challenge both within the Catholic community and in the wider social context is complex and multifaceted. What is most prob-

A few years after Vatican II, Paul VI urged a renewal of Marion piety based on biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological criteria.

A few years after Vatican II, Paul VI issued an important encyclical on devotion to Mary, *Marialis Cultus*, in which he urges a renewal of Marion piety based on biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological criteria. He is clear about the meaning of anthropological in this context. If it is authentic, it will reflect the historical Mary, and for that reason, it will also reflect the experience of the women of our generation.

In the United States, it seems to me, a call to resymbolize Mary is emerging from the pastoral challenges presented by ecumenical dialog

lematic for feminists about the Marion tradition can be signaled best perhaps by the "New Eve" interpretation of her role in salvation. This reading suggests that only Mary, the new immaculate Eve, is blessed among women, while the rest of us are daughters of the temptress Eve, occasions of sin who need to be kept under close surveillance.

Among ourselves, the Sisters of Mercy, the Spirit is also stirring around the figure of Mary. Patricia Fox, an Australian Mercy, in an article in their journal, *Listen*, suggests that the challenge of "renaming" Mary is implied in our

call as Sisters of Mercy to name the God of Mercy more clearly for our contemporaries. This challenge demands of us that we allow ourselves to see the feminine face of God, even to name God as our Mother of Mercy.

Entering into this new symbolic space will require of us not only that we be prepared to rename God, but also that we be open to questioning our Catholic Marion tradition, which is contaminated by the penchant for divinizing Mary. In our admiration for her we seem to be unable to refrain from adorning her with divine attributes. The authentic Mary,

threshold a new millennium in a world in which the vast majority of the people are desperately poor, living on the edge of survival. UN, IMF and World Bank statistics testify to the fact that the majority of these people are women and children. Our Direction Statement, articulated in the founding chapter of the Institute in Buffalo and reaffirmed in Dayton, calls us to go to these women and children as Catherine McAuley did. The signs of the historical emergence of women are evident in the UN sponsored international conferences on women, most recently in Beijing, and

our Mother of Mercy (especially if you are clutching it with an idolatrous urge), and allow yourself to enter the darkness—with poor women—in order find her anew. Hopefully, we will discover a transformed image of her that is more authentic, more expressive of the collective experience of Sisters of Mercy who like her are called bear God's mercy to a suffering world at the dawn of the third Christian millennium.

A word about the nature and importance of symbols. Symbols codify *collective history*, that is, they express the sedimented past of a *people or a culture*. Spanish Madonnas dressed in silk with gold braid, with real human hair and glass eyes speak of an ethos, a particular collective experience of the Mother of God. The many symbolic expressions of Mary represent long and varied traditions of devotion to her throughout Christian history. To "resonate" with one or another image of Mary means that we identify with something from the tradition that produced it. Some representations, although they were produced by a particular culture, bear transcendent, even universal significance. The Vladimir or Sistine Madonnas, or the representation of Our Lady of Guadalupe may be examples of this extraordinary power to signify the transcendent and timeless.

But not only do they codify the past. If they are living symbols, they *give meaning to my current experience*. Through

The authentic Mary, stripped of layers of devotional accretions, needs to emerge as the historic woman who had her own journey of faith, who allowed God to reveal his divine Mercy in her.

stripped of layers of devotional accretions, needs to emerge as the historic woman who had her own journey of faith, who allowed God to reveal his divine Mercy in her. In this process, although she may look different, she retains her title, Mother of Mercy. She remains the one who in human history most faithfully mirrored the tenderness of the Divine Mother of Mercy.

Let me remind you too that these Marian stirrings are happening at an historical moment we call the "hour of the poor". We are on the

before that in Nairobi and Mexico City. Although there are few signs that the Latin American church has awakened to the hour of women, at Medillín and Puebla it has declared a clear option for the poor.¹

So I invite you to enter into new psychological and spiritual space, *to imagine Mary anew*, to rediscover her as the daily companion and the powerful advocate of women throughout the world whose daily preoccupation is survival. It is an invitation to hold lightly your favorite image of

them I understand myself, my present reality, the cultural and religious experience I identify with today, at this moment in my personal journey. It may be that a reproduction of the Vladimir Madonna speaks more eloquently to us today than the traditional representation of Our Lady of Mercy seated on her throne with her Son on her knee and a scepter in her hand. Meaningful, living symbols also *project a future* full of hope. A merciful Mother of God will speak to me in the midst of my grief about the coming reign of God and about a time when God will wipe all the tears from our eyes.

The historical structure of symbols urges an examination of the historical context that gave them birth. The early images of Our Lady of Mercy emerged in the wake of the crusades, those thirteenth-century wars between Christians and Moslems over control of religious sites, and Mary's intervention in the practice of redeeming Christian captives.

Mercedarian Images of Our Lady of Mercy

In 1218 in Barcelona, Spain, Peter Nolasco, a contemporary of St. Dominic and St. Francis, founded the "Mercedarians," the Order of Mary of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives. Peter was a merchant involved as were other merchants both Christian and Moslem in buying back politi-

cal slaves. According to the tradition of the order, Mary appeared to Peter, commending to him the founding of a religious congregation for the ransom of Christians held captive in Moslem territory. Mary's mandate would give a profoundly new meaning and scope to his efforts, extending

root, *merces*, has undergone a series of semantic transformations . . . thus inverting its meaning. [The word that originally meant salary earned ends up] meaning something *gratuitous*, *mercy*, *miserericordia*, *redemption* of captives.²

What the Mother of God was asking of Peter the merchant

The early images of Our Lady of Mercy emerged in the wake of the crusades, those thirteenth-century wars between Christians and Moslems over control of religious sites.

their reach to the present day.

The etymology of the words, *merced*, *mercy*, and *miserericordia* reflects this new meaning that Mary was calling Peter to actualize in his life. It reflects a transformation in meaning from a reference to a commercial transaction (Peter's buying back slaves) to a reference to the restoration of the ransomed person's human dignity as a child of God (what Mary was calling him to).

Etymologically, [the Spanish word] *merced*, from the Latin, *merces*, means pay or stipend. It is what someone earns, from *mereo*, to deserve or attain through one's work. In this sense it is linked to *merx* or *merchandise* and means that which is bought or sold in the *market* [*mercado*]. Thus, a *mercenary* would be a worker or day laborer who is offered a salary, especially if he sells his convictions for money, signing up for foreign military or social ventures. So the same

was a more radical commitment: to make the liberation of captives his life's mission, to engage others in this work—and through ransoming captives in the name of her Son, to participate in their *redemption* in the full theological meaning of the term: snatch them from the jaws of spiritual death and despair. This was difficult and dangerous work, requiring the Mercedarians to risk their lives. She promised Peter and his companions her powerful and loving protection, symbolized by a scapular and the mercy shield. In many of the Mercedarian representations of Mary, her liberating power is expressed by the broken chains that dangle from her hands.

The Mercedarians, along with the Franciscans and Dominicans, were the first missionaries to arrive in Central America at the beginning of the sixteenth century, with the

mission to preach salvation to the indigenous peoples, to liberate them from their "pagan" ways. The statues and pictures of Our Lady of Mercy that emerge from that period still have their place of honor in the churches dedicated to her in Guatemala. They represent her, the patron of the conquerors and missionaries as a regal Spanish Lady. As their patron, of course, she looked like them.

in the Americas, carried Mary's banner into battle.

Later, the missionaries tried to "Christianize" the indigenous cultures, transforming their "pagan" deities and rites into Christian ones. Mary and the saints had a crucial role to play in this process. Mary often took on the characteristics of a female deity.

The appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531 to the indigenous catechumen

The wealthy families that eventually formed the national oligarchies in the Latin American countries called upon her too to develop socio-economic and political systems that would establish them and serve to protect their interests. She was their Queen Mother in the new world. The poor, too, claimed her as their Mother reigning in heaven as a powerful intercessor in all of their daily needs and as companion in their sorrows.

The figure of Mary that belongs to the church of the poor is the mother of those who suffer poverty and the companion of those engaged in the liberation of their people.

Devotion to Mary in the Evangelization of Latin America

This initial evangelization of Latin America is characterized historically as a First Evangelization. A Second or New Evangelization was initiated after Vatican II, having been given impulse and orientation by Paul VI's encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the Latin American bishops' *Puebla Documents*.

During the First Evangelization, characterized by violent military conquest, Mary was invoked by the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors and evangelizers as their Protector. These men, sent by Christian kings to extend the reign of Christ to the infidel,

Juan Diego, identifying herself as the Mother of the living God, was a dramatic moment in this conflictual history. Indigenous peoples flocked to see "the mother of the white man's god" who turned out to be brown skinned and speaking their native language, *nahuatl*. She belonged to them and still does.

During the Latin American peoples' struggle for political and economic independence from Spain in the nineteenth century, they too (along with the Spanish) claimed Mary as their patron and protector. Her power and her merciful presence sustained the liberators, who eventually prevailed in a period when Spanish colonial power had already declined.

The Second Evangelization

In the wake of Vatican II, the Latin American Bishops Conference meeting in Medellín (1968) and in Puebla (1979) proposed to change the face of the Latin American church. They expressed in the documents that came out of Puebla a clear option for the poor.

The figure of Mary that belongs to the church of the poor has been taking shape since Puebla. She is the mother of those who suffer poverty and the companion of those engaged in the liberation of their people. She is a simple woman, stripped of finery and regal posture.

In the Mariology course, the students' projects—artistic works, songs or poems—represent Mary as a poor *campesina* who lives close to them, a mother figure, but also a daily companion who shows them how to live and offers them hope for the future. For them, she is the principal protagonist of God's reign of

justice and peace. Some relate her to the female deities of the Mayan peoples, who today constitute over half of the population of the country.

The Magnificat, Mary's proclamation of the arrival of the messianic era, has become since Puebla the anthem of the people, their rallying cry. The same Spirit of God who makes her the bearer of the Messiah's presence and power to her own people, gives them hope and staying power in the midst of suffering and oppression.

Two Brazilian theologians, Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer, out of their Latin American experience, find in the Magnificat a paradoxical, even conflictive structure.³ The first part is Mary's song of humble praise and thanksgiving for God's merciful action in her; the second is a prophetic denunciation of injustice, that at the same time announces a new world order in which the poor and humble will come into their own—at the expense of the rich and powerful.

Mary's *fiat* allows the Spirit of God to break into history to renew the face of the earth, to initiate the new creation. But since the plans of the exploiters are irreconcilable with God's New Creation, God in his mercy takes sides against the exploiters. To quote Leonardo Boff, "The mercy of God is concrete and historical . . . The powerful are in truth powerful, the hungry are in fact hungry, the humble are . . . indeed needy thanks to the exploitation of the rich."

And so the mercy of God is at work in history to change this picture.

Mary's intervention at the wedding feast at Cana, read against the background of the Magnificat becomes a graceful gesture in the midst of the struggle. In the community of believers it is she who keeps the wine flowing in the hard times. When we have given all

tion as well as to our *present experience*, and they will be powerful enough to project a *future* full of joy and hope in the midst of suffering and death.

Perhaps new symbolic space could be opened for us if we evoked imaginatively three figures of Mary that also image the presence of Catherine and the thousands of Sisters of

Any new figure of Our Lady of Mercy we
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we have and still it is not enough, she intervenes to invoke the help of her Son, and to reassure us that indeed God will provide. Catherine's same tender concern for her community inspired her playful invitation to "Dance every night."

Resymbolizing Mary Mother of Mercy Out of the Vision and Energy of Catherine McAuley's Charism

Any new figure of Our Lady of Mercy we may dare to depict, if it rings true, will express our collective experience as Sisters of Mercy, women consecrated to be God's mercy to the poor, the sick and the ignorant within human history. The new figures of a Merciful Mary will have to be true to our tradi-

Mercy throughout our history. I propose the figures of: 1) Merciful Mother, 2) Faithful Virgin Disciple and 3) Valiant Woman.

Merciful Mother

Catherine founded the Institute as a response to misery, an expression of God's merciful presence among the most needy persons of her time. In nineteenth-century Dublin, these were women and children. Their survival and their human dignity became her passion.

Wasn't Catherine truly a Mother of Mercy, imaging in her historical moment the same tender love of God for the poor that the Mother of God has imaged throughout the centuries?

For all her practical wisdom and her sense of urgency in addressing today-not-

tomorrow whatever need presented itself, she also reminds us that more important than the works themselves is our merciful presence, our listening heart. We have all known the truth of her observation, "There are things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost the donor nothing: the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look, and the patient hearing of sorrows."

Her daughters have captured her spirit. Ann Marie Caron cites the following description of the Sisters' quiet presence in their first fifty years in New York:

Few that see the Sisters gliding like shadows through the crowded streets of the city on their errands of mercy ever realize the harrowing scenes at which they are present, or the different phases of human misery with which they are familiar. Few follow them to the bedside where want and disease struggle for mastery; to the cell where the condemned criminal counts the hours that intervene between him and eternity; to the damp cellar, to the miserable garret, to the home of virtuous poverty, to the pallet of repentant crime. Could we but accompany the Sisters of Mercy on their rounds, enter with them the haunts of the poor, listen to the tale poured into their sympathizing ears, or read in the town faces and attenuated forms the untold story of woe and want, we might be able to realize the value of the Institute of Mercy in such a city as New York.⁴

The tradition of mothers of mercy is preserved today in all those Sisters who are in prison ministry, or working with battered women, or with the homeless, or with people living with AIDS—and in those who have phone ministries to elderly people confined to their homes because of disability or lack of companionship. How many hours of merciful listening these Sisters do in a day . . .

This gentle presence is surely what Mary of Nazareth represented for her neighbors. We can imagine her passing hours with her neighbors, listening to their trials: sick children, their own illness or depression, the constant anxiety of not having enough to live on, conflicts with spouses or adolescent children. This is the contemporary figure of Mary, the Merciful Mother, consoling and enabling those who are poor, those who suffer. This is the Mary that our immigrant ancestors knew in New York and in other missions throughout the Americas, the same Mary that the poor of Latin America today know intimately.

Faithful Virgin Disciple

Like Mary too, Catherine was a faithful virgin disciple of the Word of God. Remember that one of her gentle ministries to the Callaghans in their final years was to sit at the bedside and read the Bible to them. Through the request of these pious Quakers, God offered Catherine access to the sacred

scriptures, a privilege not shared with many nineteenth-century Catholics. The early rule and her *Familiar Instructions* are filled with references to the scriptures. Even more telling of her love for God's word is her graceful behavior under stress, in times of uncertainty, in the face of opposition or humiliation. In these moments, in the living presence of her crucified Savior, her faith and her confidence in God only deepened.

As faithful virgin disciple of the Word, Mary of Nazareth appears to have been a woman who lived her life in the listening mode. Luke says several times, "she pondered in her heart" the surprising things God was doing in her life. Often, as the same evangelist notes, hers was a listening in the darkness, a painful struggle to understand what God was doing, and what response he expected of her. The most dramatic of these moments was when God asked her, yet a virgin, to mother a child, Jesus, who would be the very Son of God. In the words of Elizabeth, "Blessed is she who believed." This is her glory.

This too is the glory of Catherine and all the generations of faithful Sisters who followed her—our frail elderly Sisters who today maintain a vigil of prayer and patience in our houses throughout the Institute.

Valiant Woman

As the title of the child's biography of Catherine has it, our

foundress was a "Courageous Catherine," a valiant woman driven by an acute sense of urgency about Jesus' concern for poor and suffering. To bring relief to destitute women and children she accepted the challenge of founding a religious institute. Her reshaping of the forms of religious life that prevailed in her day to preserve the integrity of her founding vision speak of her daring and her deep confidence in God. "The lack of cloister, the going out in service, the absence of any harsh, dehumanizing ascetical practices," the entrusting of new, relatively autonomous foundations to young superiors, were among the distinguishing features of her new Institute.⁵ As we know, she suffered social ostracism, and clerical persecution for creating a new institutional form of God's mercy in a needy Ireland.

In our recent history, some among our own Sisters of Mercy leadership, who took seriously the call to renew religious institutes, have, like Catherine, suffered the humiliation of public ecclesiastical censure. Some of these valiant women also suffered the betrayal of some of their own Sisters. Like Catherine, they stepped out prophetically to answer that call written in the signs of the times, and discovered that their initiatives were not welcomed.

About Mary, the valiant mother of the condemned Jesus of Nazareth, who believed in Him and in his mission in the face of his apparent failure, Catherine says with characteristic simplicity and accuracy, "The dignity of Our Blessed Lady is expressed in the one title, Mother of God," and "We must cultivate the most tender devotion to the Mother of our Redeemer." Our *Constitutions* say, "Because Mary entered fully into her Son's mission she became the Mother of Mercy and our model of faith. Like Mary, we dispose ourselves to receive God's Word and to act upon it. This rhythm of contemplation and action is at the heart of our vocation to Mercy."⁶ Her Virginal, wholehearted yes in faith to God's request that she mother God in human history is her glory.

The Invitation . . .

How do we picture this woman who, like Catherine McAuley and the faithful Sisters of Mercy

- has been a merciful mother of the poor throughout Christian history?
- has been a faithful virgin disciple of the Word Incarnate, listening, pondering in her heart, assenting to the demands of that Word whatever the consequences?

- has been a valiant woman who proclaims in her *Magnificat* the triumph of the humiliated and the disappearance once and for all of political and economic exploitation of the poor?

Does she look like Mary the simple woman of Nazareth, with Semitic features and coloring? Or does she look like Catherine McAuley or another Sister of Mercy whom you have known and loved? Does she look like Mother Teresa? Is she the *Mater mundi*, the Mother of the World? Or is she a Mystery, a faceless Mystical Presence?



Notes

1. The Conference that met in Santo Domingo reaffirmed this option.
2. [Xabier Pikaza, *Camino de liberacion: el modelo mercedario*, 31200 Estella (Navarra), 1987, p. 11]
3. Ivone Gebara y Maria Clara L. Bingemer, *Maria, Mujer Profetica: Ensayo teologico a partir de la mujer y de America Latina*, Madrid, Ed. Paulinas, 1988.
4. Ann Marie Caron, "Catherine Seton of New York: 'Love the Poor . . . Love the Works of Mercy'," *MAST*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer, 1995), p. 4.
5. Mary Daly, "Spirituality and Charism of the Sisters of Mercy," undated manuscript.
6. *Constitutions*, #15.

Contributors

Carol Ann Breyer lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with her husband of twenty-eight years, a married priest. Prior to her marriage, Dr. Breyer was a Sister of Mercy of the Union, Baltimore province. She is currently a member of the national board of CORPUS.

Neil Draves-Arpaia, M.Div., is a diocesan priest and Mercy Associate (Baltimore). He holds M.A. degrees in theology and spirituality, and did graduate studies in ethics and psychology at Boston College. As storyteller, poet, and retreat director, he has worked with many religious and lay groups nationally, including twenty-one regional communities of the Sisters of Mercy. He also companions the dying.

Ann Miriam Gallagher, R.S.M. (Dallas) holds a Ph.D. in Church History from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and an M.A. in history. She has been Professor of Church History at Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland since 1979. She taught on the faculty and then served as President of College Misericordia in Dallas, Pennsylvania.

Christian Koontz, R.S.M. (Detroit) holds a Ph.D. in English from Catholic University of America. She is Professor of English at the University of Detroit Mercy. Her other areas of study include spirituality and holistic depth psychology, and currently, the implications of the new sciences on the study of language and literature. She is currently developing a website for her work with depth-writing.

Elizabeth McMillan, R.S.M. (Pittsburgh) has a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Louvain (Belgium) and an M.A. from Marquette University. She has been teaching philosophy and theology since 1992 at the seminary of the Fraternidad Misionaria de Maria in Guatemala City. She worked in corporate health care ethics at the Catholic Health Association in St. Louis, and taught philosophy at Loyola University of Chicago and Carlow College in Pittsburgh, where she also served as Dean.

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M. (Burlingame), is Associate Professor in Spirituality and Spiritual Direction in the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education at Fordham University where she chairs a concentration in spirituality. She has written numerous articles and a book on spiritual direction, *Uncovering Stories of Faith*. She frequently addresses leadership groups and congregational chapters. She has taught workshops in Australia, Guam and Ireland.

Mary Sullivan, R.S.M. (Rochester) is Professor of Language and Literature at Rochester Institute of Technology. She received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Notre Dame and an M.Th. from the University of London. Her book, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) is a collection of early archival manuscripts by and about Catherine. She serves on the editorial board of *The MAST Journal*.

Marilyn Sunderman, R.S.M. (Cincinnati) Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at St. Joseph's College in Standish, Maine, where she chairs the department and is developing an M.A. program in pastoral studies. Her book, *Humanization in the Christology of Juan Luis Segundo*, was recently published. Her current research focuses on the spiritual theology of Thomas Merton.

Discussion Questions

(Sullivan) What events during the years have given additional meaning to the inscription inside your Mercy ring ?

(Koontz) Which image best evokes your sense of mission: fire, Catherine's homemade boots, the candle, or her memory of "dejected faces"?

(Breyer) Do you think the Catholic church should invite married priests to return to some form of official, active ministry?

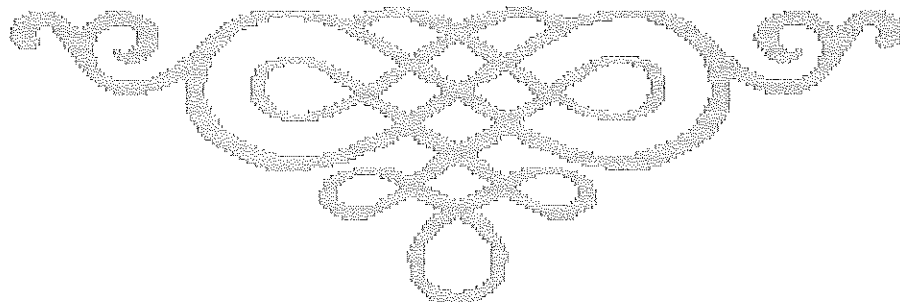
(Sunderman) What feelings and struggles of the economically poor make the most compelling claim on your attention and help?

(Gallagher) What crossing of paths have there been in your ministries which link the history of St. Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity with the Sisters of Mercy?

(Ruffing) How do these portrayals of Catherine McAuley differ?
1) She is a Catholic who clung to her faith in the midst of a Protestant majority or 2) She is a woman whose faith was shaped by a pluralistic religious culture?

(Draves-Arpaia) Do you regard the location of your present ministry at the margins, or at the center?

(McMillan) At this historical moment, what is of greater benefit for women, an emphasis on Mary's spiritual destiny as Mother of



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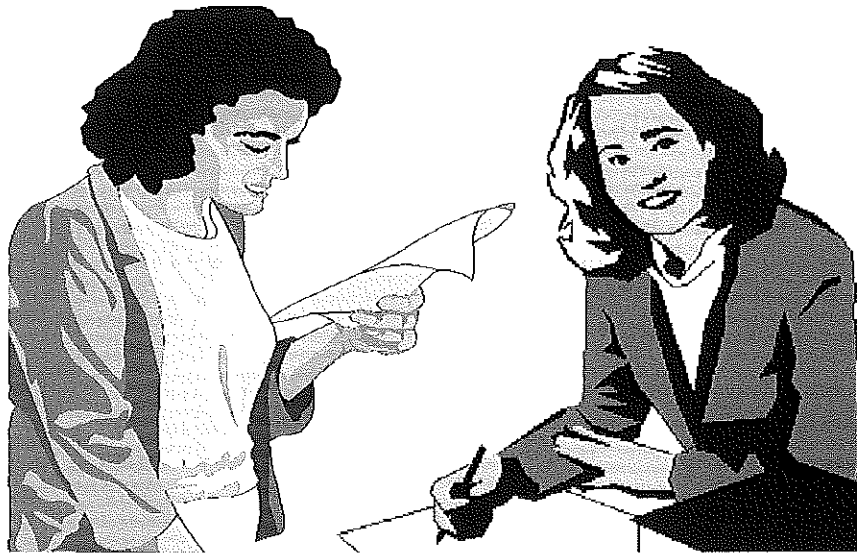
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MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

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.

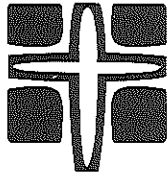
MAST has been meeting annually since then, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. 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 Donnelly, 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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