Mercy Leadership Colloquium

McAuley Institute for Mercy Education

Salve Regina University

"To seek wisdom and promote universal justice…

To work for a world that is harmonious, just and merciful."

- Salve Regina University Mission Statement

Mercy Leadership Colloquium
Office of Mission Integration

"The discharge of all these offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal, constitute the business of our lives." – *The Spirit of the Institute*

Overview:

Salve Regina University is a community rooted in the charism of mercy and committed to forming 21st century leaders working to build a more harmonious, just, and merciful world.

The Mercy Leadership Colloquium is a four-part mission integration series for Salve administrators and staff to engage resources from the Mercy, Catholic tradition, vocationally reflect on our lived experiences, and cultivate practices of mercy leadership across our campus community. Through a series of monthly gatherings with a small group of interdepartmental colleagues over lunch, participants are invited to discuss shared readings and develop or renew vocational and professional practices and priorities rooted in Salve's mission.

The Mercy Leadership Colloquium is facilitated by the Vice President for Mission Integration and welcomes staff and administrators of any religious tradition or no tradition.

Schedule:

Session	Topic	Practice	Readings
One:	Catherine McAuley and the Charism of Mercy	Sharing Our Stories	○ Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M. and Sheila Carney R.S.M., "Introduction," *Praying with Catherine McAuley* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1996), 14-33. ○ "Chapter 5: Of the Perfection of Ordinary Actions," *Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy* in Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., ed., *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 300-302. ○ Mary Angela Bolster, R.S.M. "Catherine McAuley: From the Edges of History to the Center of Meaning," *The MAST Journal* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 1-5.

AS A COMMUNITY THAT WELCOMES PEOPLE OF ALL BELIEFS, SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY, *a Catholic institution founded by the* SISTERS OF MERCY, *seeks wisdom and promotes universal justice.*

THE UNIVERSITY THROUGH TEACHING AND RESEARCH *prepares men and women for responsible lives by imparting and expanding knowledge, developing skills, and cultivating enduring values. Through liberal arts and professional programs, students develop their abilities for thinking clearly and creatively, enhance their capacity for sound judgment, and prepare for the challenge of learning throughout their lives.*

In keeping with the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy, and recognizing that all people are stewards of God's creation, the University encourages students to work for a world that is harmonious, just, and merciful.

MISSION of SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

✧ *Companions for the Journey* ✧

Praying with Catherine McAuley

by
Helen Marie Burns, RSM
and
Sheila Carney, RSM

Saint Mary's Press
Christian Brothers Publications
Winona, Minnesota

✧ Introduction ✧

Catherine Elizabeth McAuley is a woman for our era as well as her own. The Ireland of her day foreshadowed many elements of a twentieth-century socioeconomic reality. A contemporary journalist might have seen the headlines possible in the events of Catherine's life: "Heiress Turns Fortune to Folly," "Callaghan Family Challenges Caretaker's Claim to Estate," "Prominent Surgeon Threatens House Guest," "Dublin Socialite Evades Solicitors," and "Baggot Street Ladies Criticized by Local Clergy."

However, in her own time, Catherine's story was more quietly noted and appreciated. Catherine McAuley is remarkable for the manner in which she embodied the ordinary virtues in her daily life. What was said of her shortly after her death could be said of many faithful women and men: "She was convinced that Almighty God required her to make some lasting efforts for the relief of the suffering and instruction of the ignorant" (Angela Bolster, *Catherine McAuley in Her Own Words*, p. 31). She felt called, in other words, to make some contribution to the well-being of the world in which she found herself.

The beauty of her story and her person grew, according to an early biographer, as flowers in a garden, gradually and almost imperceptibly:

> The ten short years of her own religious life were but the seeding-time; it was only after her death that the full fruitfulness of her life began to show itself. At the time of her death there were little more than 100 Sisters of Mercy; fifteen years later there were 3,000 . . . one hundred years later there were 23,000. (Roland Burke Savage, *Catherine McAuley: The First Sister of Mercy*, p. 393)

This garden metaphor reflects Catherine's own love for growth and beauty. Her letters and writings contain many passages in which the spiritual life is described in garden images and the dedicated soul as "an enclosed garden where all the virtues flourish" (Angela Bolster, *Positio*, vol. 1, p. 841). Garden imagery, then, seems a fitting metaphor by which to unfold the story of her life.

Preparing the Soil

Rich Celtic soil nurtured the flower of Catherine McAuley's spirit and personality. Her family traced their lineage from ancient princes, warriors, and nobility. Catherine, born on 29 September 1778, matured in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Unemployment was high in Ireland, especially in urban areas where poorhouses and workhouses multiplied as fast as factories. Rapid industrialization as well as crop failure impelled hundreds of farmers to migrate toward urban areas for assistance and employment. Social and religious prejudice was pervasive, fueled by years of legalized discrimination. Uneven educational opportunities, neighborhood decay, and urban and rural tensions resulted from both discrimination and migration.

Extreme wealth and extreme poverty marked the social and economic reality of Ireland, straining the few welfare systems available. Modern progress eased life's burdens for some, while civil war, political unrest, and disease weakened the support systems of many others, mainly women and children. Persons of means often viewed poor people with condescension and distaste. Unrest and suffering abounded in the streets and homes of the disadvantaged, while the wealthy enjoyed fashionable food, clothing, and entertainment.

In the decades before Catherine's birth, the repeal of the British Penal Laws had begun. Freed from these laws that suppressed Catholicism and promoted the Church of England, the Catholic church once again enjoyed legitimate standing as an institution of faith and service. Its clergy, members, and practices were no longer subject to legal sanctions, nor barred from public expression. However, prejudicial attitudes

embedded in societal structures continue to mark the experience of Irish Catholics even today. Catholic Church leaders seized the moment to revitalize and renew Catholic identity, self-esteem, and influence. A significant piece of their plan for revitalizing the faith centered on caring for basic needs of impoverished masses and providing educational opportunities for children. According to Angela Bolster, author of the *Positio* prepared for the canonization of Catherine McAuley:

> This [1820–1830] was a decade of religious revival, spearheaded by Dr. Daniel Murray [Archbishop of Dublin] . . . [whose] remedy for the spiritual malnutrition in his diocese was to revive the sacramental life of the people and to increase the number of clergy, churches and schools in his diocese. (P. 66)

Into this Ireland and this church, Catherine McAuley was born.

Planting the Seeds

Catherine's early years reflected the careful seeding of Catholic upbringing. Her father, James McAuley, was an ardent practitioner of his faith and, it would appear, a shrewd entrepreneur. Catholics, even under the restrictions of the Penal Laws, were allowed to engage in trade and in nonprofessional activities. Within those parameters, James McAuley provided comfortable, upper middle-class circumstances for his wife, Elinor, and their three children, Catherine, Mary, and James.

Catherine cherished memories of her father as a sensitive and generous man who gathered the children of the neighboring slums around the tree in his front yard to teach them the mysteries of their faith. Her mother, thirty years younger than her husband, was lovely, charming, and gracious. She was also somewhat pampered by her husband and family, and quite unprepared for the responsibility of single-parenting that James's death in 1783 thrust upon her.

The death of James McAuley and Elinor's inability to manage her financial matters occasioned a gradual descent into poverty for the McAuley family. Within the year after her husband's death, Elinor McAuley sold the Stormanstown House and moved to a smaller place nearby. Three years later she and the children moved into Dublin to Queen Street to be near Elinor's friend, a Mrs. St. George. Each successive residence was smaller than Stormanstown, but they were new homes in bustling neighborhoods. Catherine and her siblings seem to have adjusted to their new circumstances with the resilience natural to young people. For a few years, life returned to the comfort of routine.

Although Elinor saw to the sacramental education of her children (the Eucharist and confirmation), she neglected the full practice of Catholicism and offered little resistance to the sharp criticism of her faith offered by Anglican and Protestant friends and relatives. Catherine alone seemed to have minded the anti-Catholic attitudes and conversations of their Dublin milieu.

When Elinor McAuley's health failed, her lengthy illness threatened the family's stability. Elinor had to sell the house on Queen Street in 1796. She and her children moved into the home of her brother, Dr. Owen Conway, where Catherine cared for her mother and her siblings. The care of her mother was particularly difficult for young Catherine, as Elinor's remorseful conscience brought much anguish of soul in her last months of life.

By the time of Elinor's death in 1798, the eldest McAuley daughter had become guardian to her siblings, nurse and confidante for her mother, and an eligible young woman in Dublin's social circles. However, the McAuley family hung precariously on the edge of destitution and dispersal. Catherine herself moved into an uncertain future with a twofold legacy:

> Her father's religious fervor crossed with her mother's intellectual independence; her mother's gentility and ability to associate in society crossed with her father's identification and involvement with the poor, the outcast and the downtrodden. (Joanna Regan and Isabelle Keiss, *Tender Courage: A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine McAuley, First Sister of Mercy,* p. 14)

Germination

The loss of their parents caused the dispersal of the McAuley children. Catherine's sister and brother moved into the home of a distant Protestant relative, William Armstrong. Catherine separated from her siblings in order to remain with the Catholic family of Dr. Owen Conway. This separation left great pain and, for Catherine, opened the way to a spiraling decline in financial circumstances.

Catherine enjoyed the companionship of the Conway's daughter, Anne, with whom she entered the rounds of fashionable parties and social events for teenagers among Dublin's upper class. Suitors and fond acquaintances surrounded the two young women at these many stylish affairs. Later, in her letters to her colleagues in Mercy, Catherine would indicate ample knowledge of the dance steps as well as the musical airs of her time.

Despite this gaiety, tension and suffering permeated the Conway household. Dr. Conway gambled and drank. Before he finally declared bankruptcy, his family often lacked adequate food and experienced the embarrassment of irate creditors and repossession of furnishings. Little more than a year after her arrival at the Conways, Catherine found herself forced to join her sister and brother in the Armstrong home.

At the Armstrongs', well-meaning Anglican relatives sought to convert the McAuley children to their faith and, consequently, the social and economic status associated with it. The financial and social elite of eighteenth-century Dublin were Anglican, and many of them viewed Catholics as generally wallowing in poverty, superstition, and bad taste. The Armstrongs shared these prejudices and wished better for their orphaned relatives.

Catherine, more than her siblings, seems to have resisted such pressure. In the face of steady, often scornful proselytizing, Catherine regretted that her own lack of education prevented her from effectively defending the faith she held with such conviction.

When she was twenty-five, an opportunity presented itself that considerably altered Catherine's spiritual development and material status. William and Catherine Callaghan, acquaintances of the Armstrongs, were attracted to Catherine's vivacity and graciousness. When they decided to move their residence to Coolock House, a country estate, they asked Catherine to join them. Envisioned in their invitation was the expectation that she would be a companion to Mrs. Callaghan, who was chronically ill, and would assume some responsibilities for their household. Catherine saw in this position a means of establishing a degree of independence for herself as well as an opportunity to utilize skills learned in the care of her mother. She most likely did not anticipate the twenty-year commitment to the Callaghan household, nor the mutual love that would lead William Callaghan and his wife to offer their name as well as their wealth to Miss McAuley.

Growing

Life with the Callaghans, who were Protestant, continued the pain of an unfamiliar religious context. However, unlike the Armstrongs, the Callaghans eventually consented to Catherine's practice of the Catholic faith, providing that she brought no signs of popery into their household. Catherine eagerly embraced this restriction in order to practice her faith openly without ridicule. She also sought spiritual counsel from several priests who were instrumental in helping her to articulate her Catholic belief.

In the service of the poor, which began to occupy Catherine's leisure time, she and the Callaghans found no tension or disagreement. She was encouraged in her desire to offer her free time to the poor school in the area and to visit the homes of poor families for whom the Callaghans provided food, clothing, and medicine. The Callaghans also tolerated Catherine's generous outreach to orphaned relatives and her efforts to support the children of her sister, Mary.

When a dear cousin, Anne Conway Byrn, died of tuberculosis, Catherine adopted her four children. The Callaghans allowed Catherine to bring the children to Coolock House and also agreed to the addition of two orphans whom Catherine had befriended from the Coolock village. Catherine seems to have had her father's love for and natural rapport with young

people who, as one biographer observes, "revealed their tribulations to her" (Carmel Bourke, *A Woman Sings of Mercy: Reflections on the Life and Spirit of Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy*, p. 4).

Catherine created a network of services for poor people in the neighborhood of Coolock House. She also gathered young girls from the neighborhood, taught them needlework, and then proceeded to open a shop on the Coolock estate to sell their handiwork. Unobtrusively, the seeds planted in Catherine's childhood—seeds of generosity, practical faith, gracious love of poor, sick, and uneducated persons—were germinating toward a full flowering.

During her twenty years as a companion in the Callaghan household, Catherine was exposed to Mrs. Callaghan's Quaker faith and practice. A recent biographer suggests that the Quaker respect and appreciation for the talents of women may have been particularly important in shaping Catherine's sense of service. It seems probable that her awareness that the Quaker "Women's Meetings" were charged with concern for the poor of their own sex may have inspired Catherine's oft-quoted maxim: "Nothing is more productive of good to society than the careful instruction of [poor] women" (Regan and Keiss, *Tender Courage*, p. 16).

In addition to significant learnings from the Quaker tradition of Mrs. Callaghan, Catherine developed her natural skills for organization, financial management, and nursing. Eventually the Callaghans gave Catherine full responsibility for managing the Coolock properties and, as their health gradually deteriorated, she provided more and more practical nursing care for them.

The deaths of Mrs. Callaghan in 1819 and Mr. Callaghan in 1822 left Catherine once more bereft of those she deeply loved. Her consolation in this instance, however, was to have seen each of them baptized into the Catholic faith on their deathbed. Her own steady faith had made a deep impression on her benefactors and each had embraced its mysteries in their final hours.

The inheritance she eventually received from the Callaghan estate, approximately one million dollars by today's standards, enabled her to focus all her resources and energies on a ministry to the poor, previously the occupation of her leisure time.

Flowering and Fruit

With the Callaghan inheritance, Catherine, at the age of forty-four, began this new phase of life by expanding her charitable efforts in the area of Coolock House. Other women with similar interests joined her in these endeavors. Gradually the idea of using the bulk of her inheritance to create a shelter for their educational endeavors as well as their ministries to orphans and homeless women took possession of Catherine. She was determined to build a home on Baggot Street, bordering a fashionable Dublin neighborhood. The home would serve as a shelter and educational center for young women from poorer neighborhoods of the city. She began supervision of the project even as she continued work on the settlement of the Callaghan estate.

Of immediate concern to Catherine was the failing health of her sister, Mary, now married to a well-known Protestant surgeon, William Macauley, and mother of five young children. Between 1822 and 1827, Catherine divided her time between the care of Mary, the sale of the Coolock House, supervision of her Baggot Street project known as "Kitty's folly" to her family, and volunteer work at Saint Mary's School for Poor Children on Liffey Street.

In the interest of this educational effort, Catherine and a woman named Fanny Tighe traveled to France in 1825 to study the educational system among slum dwellers of that country. Catherine also made close observations of the well-established Kildare Place Schools in Dublin, whose educational standards were excellent, but whose proselytizing techniques were offensive to Catholic families. All the while she dealt with growing controversy about Baggot Street as friends and neighbors became aware of her intent for this residence. To say the least, Catherine's hands were full and her days given over to a variety of tasks in a variety of sites.

When it became apparent that Mary was dying of tuberculosis, Catherine moved into the Macauley household and once more brought her nursing and managerial skills to bear on a situation of need. Her sister's return to the faith of her childhood was reward enough to Catherine. Deference to her husband's strong anti-Catholic sentiments prevented Mary

from telling her husband, although she confided the secret to her eldest daughter. After her sister's death, Catherine continued to live for a time in the Macauley home in order to care for her five nieces and nephews.

Dr. Macauley made use of every opportunity to ridicule both her faith and her Baggot Street project. One evening, during a particularly tense exchange on the subject of religion, Catherine let slip the fact of Mary's reconciliation with Catholicism. Enraged, Dr. Macauley stormed from the dining room, apparently in search of his military sword. Catherine fled to a friend's home where Dr. Macauley, apologetic and contrite, called for her the next morning.

Shortly thereafter the Baggot Street building was readied enough for occupants. Catherine's presence was still required in her sister's home, but an acquaintance, Anna Maria Doyle, and Catherine's young charge, Catherine Byrn, moved to the Baggot Street residence and Catherine came daily to assist with the activities there.

Mercy on Baggot Street

Eventually Catherine felt free to join her companions at Baggot Street. Within a short time a coterie of young socialites interested in the education of young working women offered their time, talents, and financial assistance to the works of mercy occurring in the confines of "Kitty's folly." Eventually, this group of companions adopted similar dress and a style of life that to outside observers seemed remarkably conventual.

In these circumstances, encouragement to found a religious order began to come from Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, and other concerned friends. Catherine struggled with this question over a three-year period, but accepted the recommendation as a way of giving stability to her works. Ultimately she agreed to become the founder of the Sisters of Mercy. Two years before her death, in 1839, Catherine records quite simply the resolution and its impact on her life:

> I would find it most difficult to write what you say Mr. Clarke wishes [an account of the beginning of the Order], for the circumstances which would make it interesting could never be introduced in public discourse. It commenced with 2, Sister Doyle and I. The plan from the beginning was such as is now in practice. In '27 the House was opened. In a year and a half we were joined so fast that it became a matter of general wonder. . . . Seeing us increase so rapidly, and all going on in the greatest order almost of itself, great anxiety was expressed to give it stability. We who began were prepared to do whatever was recommended and in September 1830 we went with Dear Sister Harley to George's Hill to serve a novitiate for the purpose of firmly establishing it. In December '31 we returned and the progress has gone on as you know. (Ignatia Neumann, ed., *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, pp. 154–155)

New Seed and Flower

This beginning described by Catherine McAuley placed her in select company. She joined a small list of persons in the Roman Catholic tradition whose vision not only founded a religious congregation, but also shaped a new form of religious life. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland, three remembered for such a contribution are Mary Aikenhead (Irish Sisters of Charity), Nano Nagle (Presentation Sisters), and Catherine McAuley.

In an era when cloistered life was the norm for women in religious congregations, these women struggled, as Angela Merici, Jane deChantal, Louise de Marillac, and Mary Ward had struggled before them, to create apostolic religious life. They hoped to create communities of women actively involved in meeting the needs of God's people. In such communities "vows and common life were ordered to mission, rather than mission being a simple overflow of monastic life" (Sandra Schneiders, "Reflections on the History of Religious Life and Contemporary Development," in *Turning Points in Religious Life*, ed. Carol Quigley, p. 35).

Catherine McAuley, Nano Nagle, and Mary Aikenhead benefited from their circumstances within an Irish culture

possessing a rich history that recognized the gifts of women in social and political life. Even so, Catherine's hope to gather a band of women who might serve the needs of the poor in the name of the church was not easily realized. Social mores relative to women's place in the world order as well as an ecclesial atmosphere that favored cloister for women dedicating their lives to the church occasioned subtle but effective resistance. In addition, Catherine struggled with the biases of her own heart, the destructive play of public opinion, and the censorship of clerical colleagues.

Catherine shared the Protestant skepticism about and distaste for the apparently privileged lifestyle of religious congregations. She did not wish to become a member of such a grouping, nor to create that expectation among those who gathered with her to serve Dublin's poor. Her original intent is quite clearly stated in a letter written in September 1828:

> With full approbation of His Grace the Archbishop, the institution in Baggot Street is to go according to the original intention. Ladies who prefer a conventual life, and are prevented embracing it from the nature of property or connections, may retire to this house. It is expected a gratuity will be given and an annual pension paid sufficient to meet the expense a lady must incur. (Angela Bolster, ed., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1827–1841*, p. 2)

She also experienced fierce opposition to women taking on leadership in the church. Such opposition expressed in a variety of ways began to suggest a possible value in official approval. A recent biography of Catherine McAuley describes one such instance recorded in a Dublin manuscript:

> [Rev. Matthias Kelly] had no great idea that the unlearned sex could do anything but mischief by trying to assist the clergy. Furthermore, he was prejudiced against [Catherine] whom he considered as *parvenue*. His opinions, perhaps, influenced the curates by whom he was greatly loved; for certainly they did not affect to be glad of the establishment [of the House of Mercy] either as a secular or religious institute. (Bolster, *In Her Own Words*, p. 34)

Gradually, Catherine began to understand the importance of ecclesial approval for the stabilization of her work on behalf of poor persons. For the sake of this work, she yielded to the advice of many friends and colleagues, especially Archbishop Murray. Arrangements were made with the Presentation Sisters in Dublin to provide a novitiate experience for the newly organizing religious congregation.

Catherine McAuley, fifty-two-year-old heiress, foster mother, and administrator, entered her novitiate at George's Hill in September 1830. Two younger women, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley, entered with her. Records indicate that no special privileges were accorded the age or station of Miss McAuley. In fact, she may well have been tested more severely than her youthful companions. All of them suffered great anxiety of heart as their novitiate year drew to a close and the Presentation Sisters began to question the appropriateness of their taking vows for a congregation not yet approved by the church. Archbishop Murray came to the rescue in this instance, and, on 12 December 1831, the newly professed religious returned to Baggot Street amid great rejoicing.

Baggot Street House was designated the first Convent of Mercy the next day, and Catherine was installed as Mother Superior. Still very reluctant to take on the trappings of religious life as currently expressed, Catherine wished not to use the title "Reverend Mother." The Archbishop insisted. They compromised. Catherine would accept the title "Mother Catherine," and the title would be used when necessary. An early companion observed that "what pleased us most in Reverend Mother McAuley was the absence of a manner telling: 'I am the Foundress'" (Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands: Life of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy*, p. 246).

Foundations

Whatever her manner may have conveyed, the reality of the role of founder became more and more evident. Activities of service multiplied as well as the number of volunteers seeking to join the endeavors, permanently or temporarily.

Practical programs were established to prepare the residents of the House of Mercy on Baggot Street for employment and self-sufficiency. An employment agency placed young women trained in domestic skills in the homes of reputable families. A laundry staffed by the residents provided much needed income for the works of mercy. Messages delivered for payment supported young orphan boys.

An annual bazaar featured handiwork of residents and renowned personages. Princess Victoria, soon to be queen, donated decorated boxes on one occasion, and the daughters of the Liberator, Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell, contributed time and talent from the beginning. The Liberator himself once carved the turkey for Christmas dinner at Baggot Street. While some considered the ways of Catherine McAuley inappropriately forthright and assertive, many others eagerly joined forces in her multiple efforts to address the needs of Dublin's slum dwellers.

In 1832 a cholera epidemic spread suffering and death throughout Dublin. The Sisters from Baggot Street spent long hours in the Cholera Hospital. Catherine would recall for future novices the memory of the Sisters returning shortly after nine in the evening, loosening their cinctures on the stairs, and stopping, overcome by sleep before reaching the next floor. Because the great haste to be rid of diseased bodies often resulted in premature burial, Catherine herself inspected those thought dead to ensure that this was indeed the case.

The news of the Sisters' labor and other works of the "Baggot Street Ladies" soon spread to other sections of the capital city and to points beyond. Requests began to arrive at Baggot Street for the establishment of similar Houses of Mercy in other places in Ireland, England, and eventually, the New World. Between 1831 and her death in 1841, Catherine McAuley's fledgling congregation was responsible for fourteen foundations: twelve in Ireland and two in England. The request to establish a foundation in Newfoundland was delayed until after her death.

Death from tuberculosis and cholera as well as calls for new foundations depleted the ranks of early Sisters at Baggot Street and elsewhere, but Catherine seemed always ready "to divide [whatever she had], be it ever so little" (*Letters*, p. 353). Often, too, dwindling ranks seemed to attract new entrants almost in proportion to the increase in demands for service. Catherine's trust in a providential God was rarely challenged in this regard, although the circumstances of many early foundations strained both trust and courage on all sides.

Kingstown, the first foundation outside Dublin, was the source of both humor and heartbreak. A misunderstanding between Catherine and the parish priest concerning the payment of the bills for the construction of a school left Catherine the focus of a lawsuit. "I am," she wrote in a letter to her dear friend, Sr. M. Frances Warde, "hiding from some law person who wants to serve a paper on me personally. . . . I am afraid to remain five minutes in the small parlor. This has caused more laughing than crying, for every man is suspected of being the process man, and kept at an awful distance" (*Letters*, p. 116).

Travel to the Charleville foundation in 1836 in itself proved trying. The trip from Dublin required canal packet boat to Tullamore, where the pilgrims transferred to a connecting packet that was delayed until midnight. After twenty hours on the canal, they transferred again in Limerick, this time to stagecoach, reaching Charleville the next morning. Once there, they found the house not quite ready for their arrival and so damp that their clothes did not dry out overnight.

Anglo-Irish animosity and Catholic-Protestant prejudices surrounded their foundations in England. English newspapers decried the proposed establishment of the convent in Bermondsey to such an extent that mob activity was feared. Although no public demonstrations actually attended their arrival, discomforts of culture and climate marked each step of the journey. During the process of settling the young community at Birmingham, the last of her foundations, Catherine began to show clear signs of the imminent approach of her death.

The Bloom Fades

Catherine wrote from Birmingham to the infirmarian at Baggot Street requesting some preparations for her return there.

A week later, another letter to Mary Aloysius Scott in Birr began with the comment: "I have been very weak and sick for the past twelve or fourteen days. . . . Endless visitors coming in here and I cannot leave the one aired room without coughing violently" (*Letters*, pp. 373–374).

On her return to Baggot Street, her sorrowing colleagues perceived that she was in her last illness. Catherine inconspicuously settled her private affairs, saw to the ordering of community business, and calmly turned her attention to the journey of death. To Elizabeth Moore, who had traveled from Limerick when informed of Catherine's condition, fell the task of informing the community of her death. She wrote simply: "'Of our dear Reverend Mother what shall I say? or what can I say but that she died the death of the just'" (Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, p. 376).

Perennial Harvest

In her dying, Catherine generated an abundant harvest that grafted to the ancient stock of the works of mercy a new shoot that combined action and contemplation, common life and vows shaped by service. Catherine's petition to the Holy See in 1833 clearly maintains her intent that the congregation she founded be dedicated to service outside convent walls:

> The principle aim of this Congregation is to educate poor girls, to lodge and maintain poor young women who are in danger . . . and to visit the sick poor. (*Correspondence*, p. 12)

The priority of that service in shaping common life and vows continued to be her clear intent in a letter Catherine wrote to the Vicar-Apostolic in the Midlands District of England on the occasion of the last foundation in her lifetime:

> I give you a copy of our distribution of time . . . which has been found well-adapted to the duties of our Order. It is contained in our observances, not in our Rule, and therefore subject to any alteration that place or circumstances might require. (*Correspondence*, p. 161)

The congregation founded by Catherine McAuley has continued to bear fruit through years of service to God's people.

Catherine's Spirituality

Perhaps Catherine's greatest contribution to the church, however, is not the congregation itself as much as the spirituality that enlivened it—a fresh and fertile blending of the contemplative spirit and the compassionate heart. This blending of contemplative spirit and compassionate heart unique to the early Mercy community was a gift not equally prized nor understood. For instance, when Clare Agnew became superior in Bermondsey her "extremes in piety" (*Letters*, p. 354), manifested in part by her desire to establish perpetual adoration in the convent, evoked from Catherine a clear articulation of the essential interplay between prayer and ministry in the life of a Sister of Mercy.

> We should often reflect that our progress in Spiritual Life consists in the faithful discharge of the duties belonging to our state, as regards both ourselves and our neighbour; we must consider the time and exertion which we employ for the relief and instruction of the poor and ignorant as most conducive to our own advancement in perfection, and the time given to prayer and all other pious exercises, etc., we must consider as employed to obtain the grace, strength and animation which alone could enable us to persevere in the meritorious obligations of our state. . . . We must try to be like those rivers which enter into the sea, without losing any of the sweetness of the water." (*Correspondence*, pp. 242–243)

This spirituality which is both rooted in the practical concerns of our needy world and growing faithfully toward greater union with God is succinctly described in the *Positio:*

> Her "spirituality was marked by her ability to create and maintain inner spiritual space, to be constantly aware of the mystery of God and to be able to find His touch

everywhere in the world of people, of their occupations and of their miseries. . . . Her apostolic spirituality may be said to have effectively translated the Gospel into the idiom of her time and to have conveyed this ideal to others." (Pp. 830–831)

Catherine's understanding that the authentic living of the Gospel calls us deeply into relationship with God and into the realities of our time has continued to flower among her Sisters and among all those whose experience of God opens their heart to the world's needs.

In particular, Catherine's spirituality formed itself around several key themes:

Nourishing Prayer

Catherine experienced the life of prayer to which she felt herself called and to which she called her companions as both gift and responsibility: "'Of all other gifts, [the gift of] prayer must come from God; hence we must beg it continually'" (Bolster, *Positio*, p. 782). She cautioned the sisters: "'Prayer is a plant, the seed of which is sown in the heart of every Christian, but its growth depends on the care we take to nourish it. If neglected, it will die. If nourished by constant practice, it will blossom and produce fruit in abundance'" (Bolster, *Positio*, p. 782).

This life of prayer was firmly rooted in the Gospel and in the traditional spirituality of her day. At the center of this spirituality was the person of Jesus Christ. The Psalter of Jesus, the Eucharist, the Passion, and the Sacred Heart were her favorite devotions; the desire to imitate Jesus was her constant yearning.

Mercy

Just as Catherine fostered within the church a new expression of religious life, she nurtured a spirituality suited to that new expression. A ministry responsive to the suffering of the world must be nourished by a prayer that not only strengthens our union with God, but impels us to a practical outpouring of love for God's people:

> Prayer, retirement and recollection are not sufficient for those who are called to labor for the salvation of souls. They should be . . . as the compass that goes round its circle without stirring from its center. Now, our center is God from Whom all our actions should spring as from their source. (Teresa Purcell, *Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*, p. 154)

For Catherine, prayer and ministry were not separate experiences but two dimensions of the one vocation revealing God's mercy among the suffering people she met each day. Prayer, "constant fervent prayer" (Angela Bolster, *Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy*, p. 40), was the source of the "grace, strength and animation," without which "all . . . efforts would be fruitless" (*Letters*, p. 385).

Catherine exhorted the sisters to "consider the time and exertion [employed] for the relief and instruction of the poor and ignorant as most conducive to [their] own advancement in perfection" (*Letters*, p. 385). She promised that they could expect to meet Jesus among the poor and encouraged them to allow their hearts to be "animated with gratitude and love" as persons whom Christ "has graciously permitted to assist him in the person of his suffering poor" (Rule 3:15).

A Playful and Grateful Spirit

While Catherine's spirituality drew her into the midst of the world's suffering, her deep, abiding confidence in God's love and protection engendered a playful spirit. Because she knew that God would soon come "both hands filled with favors and blessings" (*Letters*, p. 204), she was able to cast even difficult experiences in a humorous light. This playfulness often expressed itself in verse. When Mary Ann Doyle developed an inflammation of the knees from crawling from bed to bed nursing cholera victims, Catherine penned this poem to lift her spirits:

> Dear Sister Doyle, accept from me
> for your poor suffering martyrs,
> a Laurel Wreath to crown each knee
> in place of former garters.

Since fatal Cholera appeared,
you've scarce been seen to stand:
nor danger to yourself e'er feared,
when death o'erspread the land.

While on your knees from bed to bed
you quickly moved about,
it did not enter in your head
that *knees could e'er wear out!*

You've hurt the marrow to the bone,
imploring aid and pity;
and every Cardinal in Rome
would say you saved the City.

Now that the story of your fame
in Annals may be seen:
we'll give each wounded knee a name—
CHOLERA and CHOLERENE!

(*Correspondence*, p. 10)

Catherine's deep trust in God's goodness strengthened her and helped her cope, with a playful and grateful spirit, with the many trials that faced her.

Cordial Love

Perhaps the most tender and telling example of Catherine's spirit is the "comfortable cup of tea" that she asked to have prepared for the Sisters watching at her deathbed. This simple, loving gesture has served, for generations of Sisters of Mercy, as an illustration of the generous and hospitable manner in which she opened herself to her God, her Sisters, and the suffering poor who were so dear to her heart. In the meditations that follow, the image of a comfortable cup of tea will serve as an invitation to enter a comfortable, centered space in which to meet oneself and our gracious God.

Catherine for Today

In a world yearning for the touch of mercy, Catherine's example may be both encouraging and empowering. She had no great design, only a desire to make some lasting effort for God's poor. This yearning engendered a response that was practical and immediate, warm and cordial, enabling and respectful. Through this personal and simple approach, she invites us to walk in the path of mercy, the principal path marked out for those who wish to follow Jesus.

Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy

Mary C. Sullivan, RSM

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PRESS
Notre Dame, Indiana

FOUR COURTS PRESS
Dublin, Ireland

CHAPTER 5 : OF THE PERFECTION OF ORDINARY ACTIONS

1st The perfection of the religious soul depends, not so much on doing extraordinary actions, as on doing [extraordinary] extraordinarily well the ordinary actions and exercises of every day. In this particularly consists the difference between the perfect and imperfect in a religious community. The daily duties are the same for all, the manner of performing them distinguishes the one from the other.[17]

2nd The Sisters of this religious [Institute] Congregation shall therefore endeavour to acquit themselves of the ordinary duties of their Institute with all possible care and attention, according to the advice of the Holy Ghost, "The good you ought to do—do it well," *viz.*, Prayer, Examen of conscience, assisting at Mass, Office, spiritual lecture, meals, recreations, and their respective employments. By performing each and every one of those duties well, they shall perfect themselves and their day shall be full of merit and good works.[18]

3rd But in order to perform these ordinary exercises well, with a view to their own perfection, they must have the purest intention of pleasing God. God and God alone must be the principal motive of all their actions—it is this pure intention of pleasing God that renders the good work valuable and meritorious. Without this the most laborious [application] duties of the Institute, the greatest

16 Archbishop Murray inserted "suitable" and deleted "from a Priest or respectable Lady" in the first sentence. In the next sentence he deleted "to any Lady, these" and added "beyond the humble circle of their Parents' home" and "they should be" in the last clause.

17 Catherine changes "in every Religious Community" to "in a religious community" and omits "common, and" before "the same for all". Dr. Murray changed her "extraordinary well" to "extraordinarily well".

18 Catherine deletes "and functions of their Institute" after "ordinary duties", changes "Their daily prayers" to "Prayer", drops "their" before "Examen", "assisting" and "office", omits "meals" and "school duties", and changes "all" to "each". Archbishop Murray substituted "Congregation" for "Institute", inserted "of their Institute", added "meals" to the list of ordinary duties, and inserted "their" before "respective employments".

austerities, the most heroic actions and sacrifices are of [no] little value, being divested of that merit which flows from a pure and upright intention, while on the contrary, actions the most trivial when accompanied by it become valuable and meritorious of Everlasting Life, nothing is lost, every word and action fructifies, the religious soul enriches herself every moment and lays up treasures of glory for an endless eternity.[19]

4th The Sisters should consider purity of intention in all their works, not merely as a simple practice of piety, but as an essential duty of Religion. They shall therefore most studiously watch over themselves and guard against the insinuations of self love, lest they lose the merit of their labors and good works by self complacency, vain glory, or by having in their actions any other motive or end in view, than to please Almighty God. They are never to act from mere inclination, whim or caprice, but all should be performed with regularity and exactness, and be referred with the utmost fervor [be referred] to the Divine Honor and Glory, in union with the most holy actions and Infinite Merits of Jesus Christ. They shall therefore not only make a general offering in the morning to God of the works and actions of [each] the day, but also renew that offering frequently in the day, having always in mind and engraved in their hearts, this important advice of the Apostle, "Whether you eat or whether you drink, or whatever else you do, do all for the Glory of God and in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."[20]

19 In Article 3 Catherine omits "in doing them" after "must" in the first sentence; she omits "principal" and "of pleasing God" in the second sentence and changes "that characterizes the good work, and renders it valuable" to "that renders the good work valuable"; and in the third sentence she shortens "the most laborious functions of the Institute" to "the most laborious application", changes "little value" to "no value" and "and are divested" to "being divested", leaves out "and indifferent in themselves" after "trivial", deletes "virtuous" before "valuable", changes "eternal" to "Everlasting", and changes "work" to "word". Archbishop Murray re-inserted "principal" and "of pleasing God" in the second sentence; in the third sentence he substituted "duties of the Institute" for Catherine's "application", changed her "no value" to "little value", inserted "and" in "pure and upright", and added "when accompanied by it". He also provided the end punctuation of the first two sentences.

20 In article 4, Catherine omits "this" before "purity" and omits "in all their works" after "intention" in the first sentence; in the second sentence she omits "subtle" before "self love", "or" before "vain glory", and "in their actions" after "view"; in the third sentence she omits "much less from passion" after "caprice", changes "their every action" to "all", moves "be referred", deletes "by them solely" after "referred", and deletes "most holy" before "actions"; in the fourth sentence she deletes "not only", "in the morning" and "but also at the commencement of every action in particular purify their motive." Archbishop Murray added "in all their works" in the first sentence, and "in their actions" in the second sentence. In the third sentence he moved Catherine's "be referred", and added "most holy" before "actions". In the fourth sentence, he added "not only" and "in the morning", changed "each day" to "the day", and inserted "but also renew that offering frequently in the day."

5th The means by which the Sisters may preserve this purity of intention and perform well all their actions, are first to keep themselves always in the Presence of God, remembering that He sees them and that on the manner in which they perform these works depends the judgment He will pronounce on them. Secondly, to do each work in particular as if it were the only one they had to do. By this they will avoid all hurry and precipitation in their actions. Thirdly, to do the duty of every day, as if that day were to be the last of their mortal life, ever mindful of this advice of their Heavenly Spouse, "Watch, be always prepared, you know not the day nor the hour in which you may be called upon."[21]

SESSION 2

Mercy and Catholic Higher Education
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy and CMHE Statements

Mercy Identity in Higher Education

STATEMENT ON CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND MERCY CHARISM FOR CONFERENCE FOR MERCY HIGHER EDUCATION (CMHE) COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas recognizes that higher education is integral to the mission of the Church and is an effective expression of our Mercy mission. The ministry expresses our commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge and to the furtherance of the social, political, economic, and spiritual well being of the human community. We encourage collaboration among Mercy institutions, regional communities and sisters in ministry.

--Institute Leadership Conference, Statement on Mercy Higher Education, 1993

OUR CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND MERCY CHARISM

A Mercy institution of higher education stands within the lineage of the Catholic intellectual tradition in its pursuit of truth and integration of knowledge for the common good. It participates in the Church's mission under the sponsorship of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas through the ministry of education, giving tangible evidence to its mission through ongoing teaching, scholarship and service. It demonstrates the values of mercy, justice and compassion as communicated through the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy. These common characteristics are uniquely given expression within each campus community.

Graduates of Mercy institutions are informed and shaped intellectually, socially and spiritually through a faith-inspired education. The academic study of the liberal arts and sciences and mastery of the professional disciplines enable Mercy graduates to be responsible leaders in their communities and professions. They appreciate and are informed by a Christian commitment to mercy and justice in the world. The living tradition of a Mercy college or university is sustained by a strong collegial community, with hospitality to new ideas and energies, and through collaboration within the Conference of Mercy Higher Education.

Statement approved by the CMHE Board April 20, 2010,
and by the Canonical Sponsor Council April 26, 2010

Constitutions - excerpts

"As Sisters of Mercy, we sponsor institutions to address our enduring concerns and to witness to Christ's mission. Within these institutions, we together with co-workers and those we serve, endeavor to model mercy and justice and to promote systemic change according to these ideals."

"By collaborating with others in the works of Mercy we continually learn from them how to be more merciful."

"We carry out our mission of mercy guided by prayerful consideration of the needs of our time, Catherine McAuley's preferential love for the poor and her special concern for women, the pastoral priorities of the universal and local church and our talents, resources and limitations."

Sisters of Mercy - Constitutions #5, 6, 7

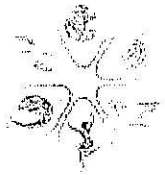
Institute Direction Statement

Animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor, we, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources to act in solidarity with

the economically poor of the world, especially women and children;
women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society;
one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality.
This commitment will impel us to develop and act from a multicultural and international perspective;
speak with a corporate voice;
work for systemic change;
practice non-violence;
act in harmony and interdependence with all creation; and
call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries.

adopted at the 1991 Founding Chapter,
revised 2005 Chapter;
affirmed Institute Chapter 2011

Critical Concerns



The Fifth Institute Chapter held in 2011 affirmed an intensified response to the critical concerns of our time including:

Immigration
Non-violence
Racism
Earth
Women

Charisms, Congregational Sponsors, and Catholic Higher Education

Susan M. Sanders, R.S.M., Ph.D.

Abstract

As gifts of the Holy Spirit, charisms serve as reference points and guiding forces for women and men religious. Charisms can be agents of stability, as well as vehicles for change within the Catholic Church itself. This article explores how the Church and religious congregations generally understand charisms and why they both believe in their preservation and transmission within Catholic higher education. The article concludes with the hope that both religious congregations and the Church will plan for and develop leaders who will understand, respect, and cherish the role that charisms play in Catholic higher education.

Introduction

Charisma. Charismatic. Charism. While similar in their etymological origins from the Greek *charisma* meaning "gift," "favor," or "extraordinary power," these words portray very different realities.

Charisma is a word that often describes influential, attractive, commanding, and dynamic leaders. Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, and Barack Obama come to mind.

Charismatic is a term Max Weber used to explain a type of legitimate authority to which the governed submit "because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific *person*."[1] A person has charismatic authority because he or she is gifted or dynamic. Charismatic also describes Christians, often within the Pentecostal movement, who

---

Susan Sanders is the Vice President for the Office of Mission and Heritage, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL.

[1] Max Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 295.

JOURNAL OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION – 29:1, 2010, 3-18.

experience such gifts of the Holy Spirit as prophesying or speaking in tongues.

Charisms are "graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world."[2] In the context of religious life, a charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to congregations of women and men religious. In general, charisms play the important roles of stabilizing and renewing the Church and the religious congregations of those who serve within the Church. In particular, charisms ground religious congregations, provide them with distinctive "flavors" or cultures, and act as reference points and as guiding forces for their ministries. Since the inception of Catholic higher education in the US with the founding of Georgetown University in 1789, religious congregations have drawn upon their respective charisms to ground and to guide their higher education ministries.

This article explores the roles that charisms play in the ministry of Catholic higher education. It examines how the Church and religious congregations generally understand charisms and why their preservation and transmission is considered important. The article concludes with an exploration of some of the challenges that religious congregations face when trying to preserve and transmit their charisms in the ministry of higher education.

How the Church Understands Charism

In a 1986 speech to women and men religious of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin proposed that even though "ecclesial documents use the word in several ways,"[3] the Church agrees that charism in the context of religious life is crucial to understanding the fundamental identity of religious life. The particular charism of a religious community determines its identity, way of life, spirit and spirituality, structures, and mission.[4]

---

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Edition (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), sec. 799.

[3] Joseph L. Bernardin, "Reflections on Religious Life, March 1986," in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Volume I: Homilies and Teaching Documents*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, C.P.P.S. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 158.

[4] Ibid.

Drawing upon both Bernardin's proposition and a set of post-Vatican II documents,[5] seven characteristics of charism can be identified. In general, charisms: (1) are special gifts that equip the faithful for a way of life or a specific ministry in the Church; (2) originate with the Holy Spirit; (3) are given to founders of religious congregations; (4) are subsequently transmitted from founders to followers; (5) are authenticated by the Church's pastors, who share responsibility with religious congregations for preserving them; (6) are distinctive; and (7) should be used for the ongoing renewal of the Church.[6]

For men and women religious, charisms are God-given gifts that function multidimensionally: first, by grounding and focusing their sponsored ministries; and second, by shaping the culture, style, and ethos of both their community and ministerial lives. As such, charisms distinguish the work and character of religious communities.

Charisms' Complementary Responsibilities

Endowed with the multidimensional gifts of charisms, what responsibilities do religious congregations share because of them? According to Bernardin, *Evangelica testificatio* identifies two complementary, but challenging, responsibilities for religious congregations which are trying to be faithful to their charisms: stability and change.[7]

---

[5] See documents such as *Evangelica testificatio, Lumen gentium, Vita consecrata, Mutuae relationes,* and *Perfectae caritatis.*

[6] See Pope Paul VI, "Evangelica testificatio: On the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio_en.html; Pope Paul VI, "Lumen gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html; Pope John Paul II, "Vita consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata_en.html; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Sacred Congregation for Bishops, "Mutuae relationes: Directives for the Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccscrlife/documents/rc_con_ccscrlife_doc_14051978_mutuae-relationes_en.html; and Pope Paul VI, "Perfectae caritatis: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life," http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html.

[7] Bernardin, "Reflections on Religious Life," 158.

> In reality, the charism of religious life ... is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who is always at work within the Church.[8] ... It is precisely here that the dynamism proper to each religious family finds its origin. For, while the call of God renews and expresses itself in different ways according to changing circumstances of place and time, it nevertheless requires a certain constancy of orientation.[9]

As "constancy of orientation," charisms are stabilizing forces for religious congregations. They define and shape each congregation's mission, and they focus the mission on activities that become institutionalized in ministries.

For instance, the charism of the Sisters of Mercy impels its members toward the compassionate service of the poor, sick, and uneducated. When institutionalized, the Mercy charism is expressed in ministries such as health care, education, social service, and pastoral care. The Dominican charism, by contrast, channels the congregation's energies into the "four pillars" of prayer, community, study, and the apostolate. Typically, this charism is expressed in the ministries of preaching and teaching and does not usually include extensive involvement in the ministry of health care. In reality, however, no type of ministry is the sole province of any single congregation. Rather, charisms direct or divert a congregation's works toward or away from various undertakings. As stable and formative reference points for congregations' activities, charisms establish a way of life that provides stability to religious congregations and to the Church in which they serve.

As a fruit of the Holy Spirit that also provides dynamism "... in different ways according to changing circumstances of time and place," charism not only stabilizes but also effects renewal and change. Such change occurs as members of religious congregations discern the signs of the times through personal and communal prayer, reflection, and discussion. The topics of such discernment are varied but often center on questions about ministries. The questions may include, for example, whether the Holy Spirit is calling the congregation to respond to a new need, or in contrast, whether it might be time to withdraw from a long sponsored ministry because there is no longer a need, because there are other persons to maintain it, or because the congregation no longer has the resources to continue the ministry.

---

[8] Pope Paul VI, "Evangelica testificatio," no. 11.
[9] Pope Paul VI, "Evangelica testificatio," no. 12.

Charism-propelled discernment often results in the founding of new ministries. For example, in Chicago during the 1970s, a coalition of religious congregations founded the 8th Day Center for Justice to work as a nonviolent "alternative voice to oppressive systems and to serve actively to change those systems."[10] This type of decision illustrates the complementary effects of faithfulness to charism: stability in founding and preserving ministries; and dynamism, change, and renewal in institutional retrenchment, and in the founding of new ministries that respond to the needs of the time.

The decision to withdraw from long-sponsored ministries is one of the most painful charism-driven and discernment-based conclusions a congregation can reach. Congregations involved in the ministry of education have known this pain often, especially since the late 1960s. In Catholic higher education, for example, the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary made the decision to close Mundelein College in Chicago. An institution committed to providing higher education for women since 1930, Mundelein College became the last four-year women's college in Illinois before its affiliation and merger with the campus of Loyola University of Chicago in 1991. The congregation's decision to merge the college into Loyola's campus resulted in the loss of identity for Mundelein College, but not of the sisters' charism. Instead, the sisters found ways to preserve their charism and core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice while sustaining the congregation's commitment to the education of women; for instance, they used some of the congregation's assets to found and to fund the Ann Ida Gannon Center for Women and Leadership, now operating out of Loyola University.[11]

Not only do charisms shape the mission and guide the ministerial decisions of religious congregations, but also they achieve something less tangible: charisms help to create a "family flavor,"[12] or style, within the religious congregation, which is expressed in ministries undertaken and in the life of the community. The family flavor of the Sisters of Mercy, for example, emphasizes compassion, hospitality, and graciousness. The flavor or élan of other congregations may be somewhat different.

---

[10] 8th Day Center for Justice. "Mission Statement." http://www.8thdaycenter.org/aboutus/mission.html.

[11] Mundelein College. "Mundelein College Archives." http://www.luc.edu/wla/mcarchives.shtml.

[12] Sister Doris Rauenhorst, quoted in Dawn Gibeau, "Where Have All the Charisms Gone? They're Alive and Being Adapted in Old and New Communities," *National Catholic Reporter*, February 17, 1995.

According to theologian Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., a congregation's family flavor or style arises from "deep narratives,"[13] or congregational histories and stories, that hold mythic importance for the community members who tell and celebrate them.

> I suggested that the category of charism as it applies to a congregation is best understood as the ongoing 'deep narrative' developed throughout the community's history with its attendant myths and symbols, outstanding events and persons, struggles and triumphs, projects and challenges, psychology and spirituality that the group has developed from its origins to the present and that has become the inner heritage of each member down through the years generating among them a shared identity....This charism may derive in part from the personal influence of some outstanding founder like Benedict or Teresa of Avila, but that is very often not the case. The issue of charismatic identity is not so much one of 'Who founded us?' as 'What have we become together by the grace of God[?]'[14]

Transmitted from generation to generation of vowed religious, charisms are, according to the Church and "by the grace of God," spiritual realities that make religious congregations "distinctive,"[15] even as they share what Schneiders calls the fundamental charism of religious life: "the call to perpetual self-gift to Christ in consecrated celibacy for the sake of the Reign of God."[16]

Thus, religious congregations do not regard charisms as artifacts of an earlier age or things they should preserve out of nostalgia. Neither do they cast charisms as strategic planning tools, although religious congregations certainly plan and use words common to that craft. To view charisms in these ways would be to reduce these powerful spiritual forces to secular organizational realities, thereby ignoring their essential dimension of self-gift for the reign of God. Instead, charisms are core spiritual forces and reference points that the Holy Spirit provides to stabilize and to change sponsored ministries such as Catholic

---

[13] Margaret Susan Thompson, "'Charism' or 'Deep Story'? Toward a Clearer Understanding of the Growth of Women's Religious Life in Nineteenth Century America," *Religious Life and Contemporary Culture, Theological Education Process,* cycle 2 (Monroe, MI: Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 1998).

[14] Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., *Religious Life in a New Millennium, Volume II: Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 74-5.

[15] Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Sacred Congregation for Bishops, "Mutuae relationes," nos. 11, 14.b, 21, 23, 25, 26, 47, 49, 57.c, 59, 59.a.

[16] Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M, *Religious Life in a New Millennium, Volume I: Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 285-86.

colleges and universities. Further, as an action of God's Spirit, charism "connotes mystery."[17] To live faithfully with mystery is always challenging, but especially when men and women religious experience a constant decrease both in the numbers of members and in their lack of direct control over their institutions of higher education.

In the midst of God's mystery, however, the Holy Spirit does not leave religious congregations and the Church without hope or without the potential ministerial resources necessary to bolster their efforts. Because the Holy Spirit confers charisms not only on religious congregations but also "among the faithful of every rank"[18] so they may be preserved "for a way of life or specific ministry[...] both within and for the Church,"[19] religious congregations will find both hope and resources in their lay colleagues who currently serve or who will serve with them in higher education. What are religious congregations doing to help these "faithful of every rank" assume increasing responsibility for protecting and transmitting charisms through the ministry of higher education?

Early Strategies to Protect and Transmit Charisms in Catholic Higher Education

Efforts to protect charisms and the ministries that derive from them have taken several forms in Catholic higher education. Earliest strategies often relied on civil and canonical governance relationships. For example, one strategy has been to require that all or a majority of the trustees of a sponsored college or university, and/or the president, the senior administration, and as many faculty as possible, be members of the sponsoring congregation. This strategy was predicated on the assumption—a relatively unfounded one in view of current congregational demographics—that congregations would be able to provide their schools with a continuous supply of qualified women or men religious who would be capable of holding key leadership and teaching positions.

A second strategy has been the two-tier governance structure that many congregations adopted following the Second Vatican Council. Here, the religious community, known as the "corporate member," is the first tier of governance and tries to maintain influence by reserving certain governance powers. These "reserved powers," usually specified in

[17] Bernardin, "Reflections on Religious Life," 158.
[18] Pope Paul VI, "Lumen gentium," no. 12.
[19] Bernardin, "Reflections on Religious Life," 158.

the institution's articles and bylaws, vary from school to school. Typically, however, they include retaining key governance functions: approving (and sometimes appointing) key leaders such as trustees and presidents; approving changes in identity-defining documents such as mission and philosophy statements, articles of incorporation, and bylaws; and approving actions that affect the assets of the school such as the alienation of property, the encumbrance of debt, or the dissolution of the corporation.

The second tier in this two-tier governance structure is the school's board of trustees. The school's board of trustees holds overall fiduciary responsibility for the well being of a school, while exercising the duties of loyalty and care. Typically, these duties include safeguarding and advancing the school's mission and purposes; preserving the institution's Catholic identity and the charism of the founding religious congregation; defining and assessing strategic directions; setting university policy; appointing, supporting, and evaluating the president; assessing the board's own performance; electing successor trustees (usually subject to the approval of the corporate member); ensuring academic quality; and protecting or growing institutional assets. As with the first strategy, the school's articles and bylaws may specify that a certain number or proportion of trustees be members of the school's sponsoring religious congregation.

As civil law structures relationships between these two tiers of governance, canon law structures the relationships among the Church, a sponsoring congregation, and its individual college or university. This relationship can be described as one of "sponsorship." What does congregational sponsorship of a Catholic college or university mean? How does it affect governance, and the resulting relationships among the hierarchical Church, the sponsoring congregation, and the administration and board of trustees of an individually sponsored Catholic college or university?

In general, a religious congregation's sponsorship of a Catholic college or university is what links that ministry to the Catholic Church. Indeed, it is what makes the ministry publicly Catholic. Canonist Sharon Holland, I.H.M., describes the primary responsibilities of a sponsor:

> We can say that, in a general way, a sponsor: Preserves and fosters the expressed mission of the institution, system, or juridic person, thereby promoting the internalization of the philosophy and mission at all levels; Administers and safeguards the properties and funds intended for the furtherance of the entity's mission. These are known as "ecclesiastical goods" (c. 1257, sect. 1),

> goods at the service of the mission of the Church—which must be handled according to canonical norms.[20]

In this passage, Holland identifies the organizational and structural key to congregational sponsorship and governance, that is, a juridic person. What is a juridic person?

A juridic person typically, although not always, "refers first to a religious institute, which in the Code of Canon Law is a public juridic person once it has been erected by ecclesiastical authority (c. 6-34)."[21] When an ecclesiastical authority designates a religious congregation as a public juridic person, the ministry of that "person" assumes a Catholic identity and becomes a recognized ministry of the Church. According to Holland, a sponsoring religious congregation is a juridic person when it assumes a public identification with a ministry such as higher education and provides some support for it in order to carry out the ministry in the name of the Church.[21a]

Future Challenges for Congregations Seeking to Transmit Charisms

Religious congregations will be challenged to recruit, prepare, and support higher educational leaders from among the faithful of every rank in the mission of preserving and transmitting congregational charisms. In emphasizing the importance of charisms in the education and support of these leaders, religious congregations will have to make sure that their efforts are not perceived as "trumping" Catholicism with charism. Neither can the distinctiveness of their charisms be used to justify any type of ministerial competitiveness that defeats intercongregational collaboration in ministries. Finally, insofar as they are charged with the responsibility of protecting and transmitting charisms, both the Church and religious congregations should want to know whether their efforts have been successful. This concern raises the issues of assessment and accountability.

---

[20] Sharon Holland, I.H.M., "Sponsorship and the Vatican," in *Health Progress: Journal of the Catholic Health Association of the United States* (July/August, 2001), no pages given.

[21] Ibid.

[21a] Ibid.

Training and Supporting Leadership from "the Faithful of Every Rank"

Focusing on the development of leadership to transmit such cultural realities as congregational charisms finds significant support in the literature of organizational behavior. Organizational theorist Edgar Schein, for example, posits that any attempt to shape organizational culture necessarily depends on the organizational leader: what she or he values and pays attention to; the messages that he or she gives; and, especially during times of organizational stress or crisis, the consistency with which he or she articulates and delivers these messages.[24] In turn, what the leader understands, accepts, articulates, and models is reflected in and reinforced by an organization's design and structure; its systems and procedures and the "rules of the game" for becoming accepted into and getting along within these systems; the design of its physical space, facades, and buildings; its language, rituals, and demeanor; its stories, legends, myths, and parables about important events and people; and its formal statements of organizational values, philosophy, creeds, and charters.[25] Many Catholic colleges and universities, cognizant of the power of such culture-creating forces, already emphasize these "secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms"[26] at campus celebrations such as Founders' Day or homecoming; at liturgy; in the choice and placement of signs, artwork, and symbols; and in their core documents.

However, because organizational culture "will always be manifested first in what the leaders demonstrate, not in what is written down or inferred from designs and procedures,"[27] religious congregations seeking to preserve and transmit their charisms would be well-advised to commit a substantial part of their limited resources to the development of college and university leaders at all levels. As a key component in shaping organizational culture, the charisms of the sponsoring congregations should be core content for leadership development programs.

Further, because "one of the most subtle yet most potent ways in which culture gets embedded and perpetuated is in the initial selection

---

[22,23] Deleted in proof.

[24] Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership: A Dynamic View* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985), 224-35.

[25] Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 237.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 241.

of new members,"[28] religious congregational sponsors and governors should pay careful attention to the people they recruit to lead and teach at their colleges and universities.[29] This includes a more than pro forma review of those being considered for membership in sponsorship and governance structures, and of candidates being considered for appointments as college presidents or trustees. Moreover, each school should take particular care in the process of recruiting new faculty members, especially those having long-term professional prospects such as tenure-track faculty members.

Organizational theorists who espouse leadership theories of organizational change are not the only ones who believe leaders are keys to organizational success and the transmission of organizational culture. Pope John Paul II, in the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*,[30] also focuses on the importance of organizational leaders in Catholic higher education as being central to maintaining an institution's Catholic identity. John Paul II emphasizes that those in leadership positions within Catholic higher education—trustees, presidents, and faculty members—should be, as much as possible, Catholics who both practice and are conversant about their faith. As noted in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, "the university should strive to recruit and appoint Catholics as professors so that, to the extent possible, those committed to the witness of the faith will constitute a majority of the faculty;"[31] "to the extent possible, the majority of the board should be Catholics committed to the Church;"[32] and "the university president should be a Catholic."[33]

Ensuring that Charism Does Not "Trump" Catholic

John Paul II's emphasis in *Ex corde* on having Catholic leadership at Catholic colleges and universities, and the absence of a discussion of the role of congregational charisms in higher education, suggest a belief that the ministry of Catholic higher education is not so much about being Mercy, Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan, Benedictine, or Vincentian as it is about being Catholic. Some researchers, however, have suggested

---

[28] Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 224-35.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Pope John Paul II, "Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html.
[31] Ibid., Particular Norms, Article 4, Sec. 4.a.
[32] Ibid., Article 4, Sec. 2, a.
[33] Ibid., Article 4, Sec. 3.1.

that many Catholic institutions may have lost sight of the Catholic dimension of their identity and allowed charism to supersede.

Researchers Melanie Morey and John Piderit, S.J., for example, believe this may be the case when a school's recruitment literature and branding leads

> with words like Jesuit, Dominican, Mercy, Franciscan or Lasallian, instead of Catholic; ... [or when] mission statements refer to Mercy or Jesuit institutions in the Catholic tradition. [Here] congregational identity trumps Catholic identity. This approach puts the cart before the horse; it is a strategy that undermines vibrant Catholic institutional identity.[34]

Morey and Piderit also arrive at this conclusion, observing correctly that faculty and staff are more likely to talk about—and even express affection for—the charisms of the founding and sponsoring congregations than they are to talk positively, knowledgably, or even at all about the Catholic identity of their colleges or universities.

There may be several reasons for this. Most have nothing to do with any conscious decision on the part of sponsoring congregations to have charism "trump" Catholic. While it is sadly true that some faculty and staff at Catholic colleges and universities have antipathy for Catholicism, most simply do not have sufficient theological training to understand Catholic theology, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, or Catholic Social Teaching.

Charisms, on the other hand, while sometimes misconstrued as being "different" or apart from Catholicism, are generally more accessible and more proximate than Catholic theology or the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. They have become part of an institution's history and ethos, and are perceived as palpable in the lives of men and women religious who serve at the college or university. Because they are more accessible and, thus, easier to understand, charisms can become the starting points for discussions that lead the skeptical or uninformed into possibly significant conversations about Catholic theology, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Catholic Social Teaching, and the sacramental and moral life of Catholicism. Perhaps by encountering and understanding the charisms of Saint Francis or Catherine McAuley, for example, members of the campus community might be better able to access the Church's teachings on simplicity, stewardship, compassion, and service.

---

[34] Melanie Morey and John Piderit, "Identity Crisis," *America* (October 13, 2008), http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11119&o=33357.

Serving as an introduction to Catholicism, charisms can become important avenues for conversations about Catholic teachings such as human dignity, the common good, sacramentality, vocation, and social justice—conversations that can enhance a college or university's Catholic identity. In these cases, charisms would not trump Catholic. Rather, they would be forces that college or university leaders could draw upon to expose members of the campus community to new and valid understandings of what it means to be Catholic.

Drawing upon Charisms for Collaboration, not Competition

Religious congregations are clearly proud of their distinctive charisms. In fact, since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has encouraged congregations to discover that which is distinctive about their charisms. However, according to Schneiders, in some cases this search has led communities away from their shared charism of religious life and toward an intercongregational competitiveness and divisiveness. Specifically, Schneiders argues that the Second Vatican Council's exhortation to religious congregations to return "to the charism of their founder"[35] was "at least as divisive and disheartening as unifying"[36] and occasionally resulted in "mutual disdain among orders,"[37] sometimes to the degree that it inhibited intercongregational collaborations or affiliations.

In higher education, for example, it has been more common to see the complete takeover of one college or university by another than it is to see mergers that maintain the charisms and identities of each collaborating partner. For this reason, some congregations would prefer to "go it alone" rather than risk the loss of charism and identity that typically results from these types of partnerships. Still other congregations refuse to consider partnerships on the grounds that their distinctive charisms preclude collaboration with those having different charisms. In each of these cases, it is difficult to understand how the shared charism of religious life and the distinctive congregational charisms that guide many religious toward the ministry of higher education should become the rationale for refusing to cooperate in efforts to strengthen a common Catholic ministry. Perhaps by recalling what Schneiders describes

[35] Pope Paul VI, "Perfectae caritatis," 2; Pope Paul VI, "Evangelica testificatio," 11.
[36] Schneiders, I.H.M., *Finding the Treasure*, 287.
[37] Schneiders, I.H.M., *Finding the Treasure*, 298.

as the fundamental and shared charism of religious life—"perpetual self-gift ... for the Reign of God"[37a]—religious congregations can avoid the emphasis on distinctiveness that sometimes leads to divisiveness, and find the common ground that leads to ministerial collaboration for the sake of the Kingdom.

Assessing the Success of Preserving and Transmitting Charisms

For all their efforts to preserve and transmit their charisms throughout institutions of Catholic higher education, how will religious congregations and the Church know whether they have been successful? This question raises the issues of assessment and accountability.

Organizational best practices suggest that the ideal way to measure success is to set goals and objectives that have measurable outcomes. But how effectively can one measure the construct of charism? Further, how might sponsoring bodies measure the success of their efforts: whether their charisms have been transmitted; by what vehicles; to what degree; and at what cost?

While it will be relatively easy to catalog *what* sponsoring bodies and individual colleges and universities have done to promote the preservation and transmission of charisms, it will be more difficult—if not impossible—to determine whether their efforts have actually had the desired effect. Documenting financial resources spent on efforts and programs to preserve and transmit charisms and counting how many people participated in them would be fairly straightforward. Neither of these is an outcome; rather, both are inputs. Yet, while it is possible to survey people about their attitudes and behaviors, determining whether real attitudinal or behavioral change has actually taken place is more difficult. Thus, attempts to engage in best practices that measure the success of preserving and transmitting charisms are fraught with daunting methodological complexities.

Nevertheless, the difficulties of measurement and assessment do not preclude a sponsoring congregation's legitimate expectations for accountability at all levels of sponsorship, governance, and college or university practice. Given the reality that charism is ethos and mystery,

---

[37a] Ibid.

as well as a force for both stability and change in a congregation's ministries, a better approach to assessment might be simply to discover and catalogue what each governance group and institution is doing to reinforce the sponsoring congregation's charism. While not technically assessment, such a process would nevertheless hold governors and institutional leaders accountable for *trying* to preserve and transmit congregational charisms. Further, such an approach would respect the individual autonomy and unique culture and circumstances of each school, even as the method generates useful information that could be shared among those charged with charism- and mission-related responsibilities. Finally, though such an approach fails to be rigorously quantifiable and to establish definite causal relationships, it would provide a relatively inexpensive way to hold sponsoring bodies, individual schools, and their trustees accountable for Catholic identity and congregational charisms at each level of authority and influence.

Charisms, Congregations, and Catholic Higher Education: A Challenge to the Church and the "Faithful of Every Rank"

Because of the important roles of charisms, both the Church and its religious congregations share the responsibility for preserving and transmitting them to the "faithful of every rank." To protect the transmission of these charisms, and the ministries and organizational flavor that derive from them, religious congregations have adopted a variety of strategies that involve the corporate and canonical restructuring of their sponsorship and governance relationships. While each of these strategies has inherent strengths and weaknesses, these efforts have brought new resources and strengths to Catholic colleges and universities. For instance, in the case of the Sisters of Mercy, the formation of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) has already been effective in key areas of sponsorship and governance.

Going forward, however, sponsoring congregations will need to do more than redefine authority relationships and exercise control through vehicles such as reserved powers. They will need to plan for and develop the types of leadership at all levels of sponsorship, governance, and administration that will help the laity understand, respect, and even savor the role that charisms could and should play in institutions of Catholic higher education. Once substantial efforts have been undertaken to recruit and train dedicated lay leaders at all levels of sponsorship, governance, and higher education administration, both congregational and Church authorities will then need to acknowledge and respect the

competence of these lay leaders. Thus, the beneficiaries of charism will become the carriers and promoters of charism, creating a future for Catholic higher education that is guided with faithfulness, characterized by self-gift, and renewed by the informed and courageous actions of lay men and women committed to establishing the reign of God.

At the Intersection of Catholic and Mercy: There's an Elephant in the Room

Mary Hembrow Snyder, Ph.D., Alice Edwards, Ph.D., and Richard W. McCarthy, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article addresses apparent impasses between "Mercy" and "Catholic" identities in our colleges and universities. Each of the contributors represents a unique voice arising from her or his role and experience within the university community. All are grappling with the tension generated by the university's efforts to discover, communicate, and embody what it means to be both Catholic and Mercy at this uncertain juncture in the post-Vatican II Church in the United States.

Mary Hembrow Snyder, *Voice One*

And the elephant's name is "impasse."

Anyone familiar with the profound meaning of this term, as offered by Constance Fitzgerald, will recognize that, in our day, we are involved in a plethora of impasses, "relational, ecclesial, societal, political, ethical, scientific, economic, environmental and cultural."[1] In an earlier explication of the meaning of the term, Fitzgerald wrote, "By impasse I mean that there is no way out of, no way around, no rational escape from what imprisons one, no possibilities in the situation...every logical solution remains unsatisfying, at the very least...and the most dangerous

Mary Hembrow Snyder is Director, Center for Mercy and Catholic Studies, Mercyhurst University; Alice Edwards is Professor of Spanish and Associate Dean, School of Arts and Humanities, Mercyhurst University; and Richard McCarthy is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Mercyhurst University; Erie, Pennsylvania.

[1] Constance Fitzgerald, OCD, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory," in *The Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 64, ed. Jonathan Y. Tan (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 21.

temptation is to give up, to quit, to surrender to cynicism and despair."[2] Moreover, Fitzgerald states that the inability to trust anyone or anything, accompanied by a pervasive sense of powerlessness, is an additional hallmark of impasse, no matter the specific type being experienced.

At the intersection of Catholic and Mercy, I suggest that our current impasse is both relational and ecclesial. It is particularly agonizing for those whose historically conscious worldview differs significantly from the classical worldview seemingly upheld by many members of the magisterium. At the same time, such differences are surely shared among university and college presidents, members of our boards of trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, alums, and students. If one is a Catholic theologian, however, or member of a department of religious studies, this difference, unfortunately, makes the impasse more neuralgic. As John C. Haughey, SJ, has observed:

> The tension that sometimes exists between the magisterium and the academic community of theologians has much less to do with faith, and much more to do with cultural conflicts, than I think has been appreciated by both sides. The lay academic community is rarely peopled by professionals who have matriculated in a classical culture. And the hierarchy is rarely peopled by professionals who have been formed in a modern academic culture...most members of the hierarchy have not done their studies in secular university, and most often their degrees are in canon law or in theology of a more classical character. The lay theologians in their schools have seldom been trained where and how their bishops have been. Both populations are, of course, on the same search for meaning...while being besieged by the same mass culture.[3]

Haughey suggests a further insight: "They have the same extremes to avoid and the same center to inhabit,"[4] and getting to that center will require incredible patience, openness, and understanding, all guided by the central principle of *love*, "love of one another, love of the truth, love of the church, and love of Christ."[5] Nonetheless, as Terrence Tilley, former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, has

[2] Constance Fitzgerald, OCD, "Impasse and Dark Night," in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 288.

[3] John C. Haughey, SJ, *Where Is Knowing Going: The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 146-147.

[4] Ibid., 147.

[5] Ibid.

remarked, impasses can become stalemates.[6] This assuredly happens when mutually respectful dialogue is aborted for a solution forced upon a theologian without due process. Here the love that Haughey suggested above is trumped by what many theologians regard as an anti-evangelical use of power by the bishops and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Moreover, how many bishops, university authorities, and theologians have, in all honesty, engaged in "close, personal and pastoral relationships...characterized by mutual trust, close and consistent cooperation and continuing dialogue...in the spirit of *communio*...fostered by mutual listening...collaboration...and solidarity"?[7]

In both cases, failure truly to see "the other," with the humility and compassion of Christ, more often gives way to avoidance, fear, stereotyping, and distrust. All of us stalled at the intersection of Catholic and Mercy are called, *in imitatio Christi*, to embrace the other, with all the risk, uncertainty, and potential hope this entails. And how may we characterize "the other"? "She [he] is the one who is different from us, the one who complicates our identity, the one who prevents us from completing our tasks. The other is the one who, by definition makes us uncomfortable, who alters our life like the man who 'fell among robbers' in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37)."[8] Will we continue to pass by "the other" we seem to have become in one another's eyes? Rather, aren't we obligated by virtue of our commitment to the *basileia tou theou*, and as the people of God, to confront the challenges we face *together*, for the good of the whole Church? Candidly speaking, however, can we do this without committing or recommitting ourselves to the practice of contemplative prayer, to what may be for all of us "the prayer of no experience"? As Constance Fitzgerald describes it,

> ...this prayer, expressive of a prophetic hope, is an important contemplative bridge to a new future, to the transformation or evolution of consciousness, and through these *prayers of no experience*, the human person is being changed radically. Reaching beyond the horizon of present expectations and imagination, willing to go beyond the boundaries of their lives/selves to make an

[6] Terrence Tilley, "Three Impasses in Christology," in *The Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society*, 64.

[7] U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Application of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* for the United States," in *Catholic Identity in Our Colleges and Universities* (Washington, DC: 2006), 79.

[8] Jose Sols, "Thinking about Jesus in Secular Europe," in *Jesus of Galilee: Contextual Christology for the 21st Century*, ed. Robert LaSalle-Klein (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 215.

> irrevocable passage into a new place, a new way of "being" in the universe, these prophets of hope stand open to receive the unimaginable future to which God is alluring us, and more: they actually serve as a doorway to it.[9]

Engagement with prayer like this leads to *metanoia*, transformation, what Fitzgerald refers to as "a dispossession of selfhood." She writes, "What this prayer predicts as possibility for what the human person and the human community are to become is far beyond what a coalition of strong-willed, autonomous, right thinking, ethical people can ever achieve on their own. I know that with this formulation I have gone into a dangerous space where language fails me and impasse confronts me."[10] Hence, if our Christology fails to lead us into *communio*, if we refuse to behold the other with merciful eyes, if we run from the discipline required to enter into the prayer of no experience, thus avoiding the cost such dispossession demands, how will we ever transcend the current impasses we face as members of the Body of Christ?

Furthermore, as Catholic institutions rooted in Mercy, don't we empty our mission statements of any authenticity if we fail to pursue the merciful behavior so characteristic of Catherine McAuley?[11] Awash in impasse, we must, nevertheless, begin anew. As M. Shawn Copeland has reminded us, "discipleship costs." Thus, trustees, university and college presidents, upper-level administrators, and so forth, along with their theologians and religious studies faculty, must communicate humbly, honestly, and often with their local bishops. And bishops must respond in kind. As James Hanvey, SJ proposes:

> We need to discover or recover a new relationship between the ecclesial charism of theology and that of the magisterium – local as well as Roman. Above all there is need for a clearer and effective theology of the *sensus fidelium*, which is not just a passive assent to Christian truth but an active wisdom manifest in the faithful praxis of Christian life and witness. Without this the church will never have a mature theology of the laity or realize the full effectiveness of its

[9] Fitzgerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 39. She explains the "prayer of no experience": "Very often after years of trying to pray and live faithfully, after receiving precious graces, consolations and insight, persons experience not presence, but *nothing*, silence, in their prayer…they report that there is absolutely nothing discernible going on when they pray and yet they do need prayer; they are faithful to it and actually spend considerable time in silent *there-ness*. But the only experience is *no experience*, the silent place" (36).

[10] Ibid., 38.

[11] Mary C. Sullivan, RSM, Ph.D., "Catherine McAuley and the Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education," Conference for Mercy Higher Education, http://www.mercyhighered.org/identity.html.

> magisterium. Unless the church trusts theology, its mission and its risk, it will fail in its evangelical task. It will cease to have a conceptual command of the cultures in which it lives; it will be inarticulate and incomprehensible before them, lacking sufficient means to address complex issues of the time with insight, reason, humanity, understanding and truth.[12]

Poignantly, let us take one another down from the cross. Let our ecclesial and relational impasses give way to transformation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewed hope—at the intersection of Catholic and Mercy.

Alice Edwards, *Voice Two*

Parker Palmer, in his book *The Courage to Teach*, states that "unlike many professions, teaching is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life."[13] Creating a class community, urging our students to connect with material, revealing our own passions—all of these things require teachers to be vulnerable in a particularly public way. Many of us know that this and other dangerous intersections are where the "good stuff" takes place—not in canned lectures, objective tests, or impersonal, rigid requirements, but in engaged conversation, spirited disagreement, and admissions of uncertainty.

There are other dangerous intersections in the university, and the past few years have made it feel that, in particular, Catholic universities abound in them. As an academic administrator trying to help hire, support, and evaluate faculty, I have been asked to define the rather hazy boundaries between personal and public life, between our dual roles as a Catholic and an academic institution, and how these boundaries might affect faculty—and the university—for better or worse. For instance, how do we, as a Mercy school founded with values of intellectual rigor, make space for this rigor when it is applied to firmly held precepts of the Church? How do we evaluate the scholarly or service activities of faculty, listed on their annual merit evaluation forms, when these activities might rub up against Church teachings? How do we express the Mercy value of hospitality to new faculty, whose same-sex partners are denied health care benefits? How does our faculty, responding to our tradition of community engagement, take on public roles in the community when those roles challenge doctrine?

---

[12] James Hanvey, SJ, "The Shape of the Church to Come," in *America*, March 18, 2013, http://americamagazine.org/issue/article/shape-church-come.

[13] Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 17.

Perhaps staff benefits, merit evaluation, and tenure portfolios are very workaday examples, but they are how the university's central values are communicated to faculty and administrators, in a way more meaningful than symposia or mission statement bookmarks. These examples are also where it becomes clear whether or not the university has articulated its values to its academic administrators, whether its mission is understood and carried out, defended and passed on, by its members. When a new faculty member asks if it is OK for a student in his class to pursue a certain research topic, because he thinks it might not be appropriate for a class at a Catholic school, or when another keeps silent during a television interview when the topic turns to birth control—despite his expertise in this area of health care—we see that we have not done enough to communicate a clear sense of how our Catholic identity intersects with our fundamental role as a university.

When new faculty members are hired at my institution, they are asked if they feel that they can support the Catholic mission of the university. I have never heard of a candidate saying no. First, of course, the job market is tight, but perhaps another reason is that the question is so amorphous. I feel sure that, if the candidate asked the interviewer, the potential department chair, or their new colleagues, what the question actually meant—what commitment was being called for—few people would generate the same definition. It is not uncommon to hear faculty or administrators say that they prefer to focus on the Mercy part of our identity, implying that somehow they can separate the Mercy from the Catholic. But perhaps they are recognizing the fact that the Mercy values of hospitality, justice, and compassion are seeded deeply in our community, and serve as a way to bridge the distance between our Catholic identity and the diverse traditions, beliefs, and positions that our community members hold.

Even with a nuanced view of the moral and political geography of this moment in Catholic higher education, our goal is a moving target. Our desire to reconcile *Ex corde Ecclesiae's* vision of the Catholic university with our heritage as a progressive Mercy school will undoubtedly never be neatly resolved, but will challenge us again and again to discern carefully, to communicate well and thoroughly, and to act justly as each situation presents itself in its individual context. When several faculty and administrators sat down last year to draft a statement to help guide the university with regard to the boundaries between academic freedom and commitment to a Catholic mission, we were pointing out that we can no longer take for granted that everyone at our growing

institution shares the same understanding of what these terms mean and how we live them out.[14]

Now more than ever, administrators and faculty leaders must study, reflect on, and openly discuss their Mercy and Catholic identities in order to educate new faculty—who are increasingly not Catholic, not educated in Catholic schools themselves, not privy to the delicate relationships between the Church and the university. We must also be vigilant as we define and protect our boundaries—so that our faculty don't get caught in the intersection.

Richard W. McCarty, *Voice Three*

Mercy colleges and universities are remarkable centers for learning, where faith and reason can flourish. On our campuses the humanities are taken seriously, the sciences are rigorously pursued, service is encouraged, and religious practice is accepted for those who elect to pursue it. Students have access to scholars who take their fields seriously and who contribute scholarship nationally and internationally. To attend a Mercy college or university, then, is to seek out a first-rate academic experience. But in the midst of our academic communities there is a multidirectional intersection of our Catholic and Mercy identities. Many of these crossings are wonderful moments of synthesis—points at which institutional mission and values are shaped by the educational legacy of the Sisters of Mercy, their values, as well as the breadth and depth of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. But not all intersections between Catholic and Mercy are easy crossings. At one of those crossings we face mismatched understandings about *academic freedom*, whether in its exercise and protection or in instances of its infringement. Much of this has to do with how we understand the Catholic identity of a Mercy college or university.

While there are many active discussions about what *Catholic identity* means (both in the churches and in our academic institutions), we can

[14] Our statement—still a work in progress—says: "Mercyhurst University is a Catholic institution of higher learning in the Mercy tradition. It aims to embody the timeless values of the Catholic intellectual tradition and the values of a classic university, including rigorous, constructive scholarship and artistic expression. These values require an authentic presentation of Catholic doctrine in any course whose content addresses it. At the same time, Mercyhurst, as a university affirming the best and highest standards of scholarship and creativity, affirms the academic freedom of its individual faculty in their academic and public scholarship and artistic presentations."

think of that identity in at least two ways. First, by virtue of our founders, Mercy colleges and universities have a Catholic identity that is grounded in the mission and values of the Sisters of Mercy. When we emphasize the Mercy values of dignity, excellence, justice, service, and stewardship, the Catholic identity of our colleges and universities is one that is ordered toward academic freedom and the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding between divergent voices—even if some of those divergent voices are resident scholars who critique or disagree with official Roman Catholic teaching. Second, by virtue of the Sisters of Mercy belonging to the wider Roman Catholic Church, Mercy colleges and universities have a Catholic identity as sites of Roman Catholic influence and perspectives. To that end, where the emphasis on Catholic identity favors the promotion of Catholic orthodoxy, academic freedom can suffer.

To understand why academic freedom is a growing concern for Catholic campuses, we must first look at the academic structure of the college or university itself. Namely, in any attempt to compete with the best academic centers domestically and abroad, Mercy colleges and universities must attract (and retain) the strongest faculty members available. Reputations of colleges and universities hinge, in part, on the quality of teaching and research being produced by a faculty body. Mercy colleges and universities know this, and thus are recruiting faculty from major research universities (regardless of the faculty member's religious affiliation). Mercy institutions are also finding ways to free faculty to engage in scholarship within their academic disciplines. But, as we are becoming more aware, sometimes lines of research "transgress" Catholic orthodoxy. Recently, scholars (and scholarship) in theology, as well as in religion, ethics, and sexuality, have been targeted by the Doctrine Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for crossing those lines and "confusing the faithful."[15]

Thus, the intersection between *Mercy* (i.e., where the Mercy values promote academic freedom, dialogue, and understanding) and *Catholic* (when this term is used to mean "orthodoxy") may very well be a site of frequent collision in 21st-century academia. The Vatican's recent reapplication of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* has only heightened the concern. What is more, the battlegrounds on which these conflicts take place are some of our most prestigious and well-regarded educational institutions. Since 2010 alone the various showdowns between the USCCB and a litany of

[15] Richard McCarty, "Objects of the Inquisition," *Academe* (January/February 2014): 25-29.

scholars at Catholic colleges and universities have served to highlight the realities—and difficulties—of being a well-regarded educational institution, under the intense scrutiny of "orthodoxy." One need only consider the recent cases of Salzman and Lawler, O'Brien, Tadlock, Farley, and Johnson to understand the growing problem.[16]

At the same time, Mercy colleges and universities need not wait around for crises to hit. I suggest that the call for *communio* between Catholic colleges and universities with Church officials is a good place to start. Indeed, *communio* itself appears to rely on the Mercy values—values that are ordered toward building better relations between people through mutual understanding. As with all healthy (and holy) relationships, it is important for us to establish appropriate boundaries between bodies. The Mercy values do just that. The Mercy values remind us that excellence is required in the classroom and in scholarship. Such excellence requires freedom of inquiry and scholarly discourse, even if that scholarly discourse "transgresses" tradition. Even so, the Mercy values are particular instantiations of a Catholic worldview, and thus our colleges and universities are certainly connected to the larger body of the Church. Thus, we do need to be in respectful dialogue with Church officials. But *dialogue* means that both bodies are respected and allowed to speak from their perspectives. Authoritarian demands from the Church, as well as stiff indifference from scholars, are both exercises of *monologue*—and such cold monologue has nothing to do with the Mercy values that shape our institutions. If we need a reminder as to why this is important, looking to our recent past is helpful.

In particular, it would do us well to remember the American social history out of which Mercy colleges and universities (if not all Catholic colleges and universities) worked so hard to establish their credibility and reputation for excellence. In particular, Catholic colleges and universities had to demonstrate that the terms "college" and "university" *qualified* their "Catholic identity" as much as their Catholic identity set them apart from public and Protestant institutions. Consider, for example, that it was Presidents Grant and Garfield who both referred to Catholic churches and their schools as centers of superstition that did nothing to build up the American nation. In reference to *both* Catholic churches and schools, Grant once said, "If we are to have another contest in the near future of our national existence, I predict that the dividing line will not be Mason and Dixon's, but between patriotism and intelligence on the one side, and superstition, ambition, and ignorance

[16] Ibid.

on the other."[17] Garfield would say that "Catholicism remained hostile to every fundamental principle of the United States constitution and of modern civilization."[18]

In response to such hostility and prejudice toward Catholic churches and schools, American Catholics (religious and lay) had no choice but to demonstrate that Catholic institutions were not antithetical to freedom. Indeed, any and all that were Catholic had to work through the skepticisms that so many non-Catholic Americans held *about* and *against* a strong "Catholic identity." They faced a monumental task. As a 1927 *New Republic* editorial would put it, "The real conflict is not between a Church and State or between Catholicism and Americanism, but between a culture which is based on absolutism and encourages obedience, uniformity and intellectual subservience, and a culture which encourages curiosity, hypotheses, experimentism, verification by facts and a consciousness of the processes of individual and social life as opposed to conclusions about it."[19]

Unfortunately, the idea that "Catholic identity" is one that breeds absolutism and intellectual subservience is one that we have to address *again*—this time in the context of how Catholic colleges and universities respect academic freedom in their function as centers of higher learning. *But there is hope*. For example, many Catholic colleges and universities came out on the winning end of nineteenth-century anti-Catholic prejudices. The intentional decision by Catholics (religious and lay) to make the best colleges and universities available yielded a plentiful harvest of educational centers that have been sought after by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. These colleges and universities—many of them Mercy institutions—climbed the charts of national school rankings and levels of public respect, producing excellent students and supporting faculty whose scholarship has touched (and shaped) nearly every field.

The existing problem, however, is that the intersection of Mercy and Catholic (where "Catholic" is taken to mean the imposition of "orthodoxy") *now* threatens to reignite the flames of those old fears about a church that "is based on absolutism" and "intellectual subservience." In our time, the fear is that the definition of Catholic identity is tantamount to an inquisition of orthodoxy—and that such an inquisition will

[17] John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 91.
[18] Ibid., 93.
[19] Ibid., 170.

only compromise our academic freedom; something that requires exploration and "experimentism." Indeed, the fact that we can point to a list of scholars (at Catholic colleges and universities) who have been interrogated or whose teaching has been condemned by the Vatican or USCCB provides the *perception* that the "Catholic identity" of our colleges and universities is merely code for narrow orthodoxy. That perception (however much it does not represent the best of the Catholic Church or Catholic colleges and universities) is one that Mercy values should seek to transform. If not, we're in trouble. If for no other reason, the perception of an inquisition of orthodoxy has led some scholars to believe that academic freedom will only be *selectively* protected at our colleges and universities—so long as our work does not excite the anxieties of the hierarchy (whatever those may be, from time to time). Indeed, as Jamie Manson of *Religion Dispatches* recently noted:

> For all the advances on some Catholic campuses, a culture of fear [and silence] still looms heavily.... This silence, whether self-imposed or ecclesiastically-ordered, raises important questions about the future of younger theologians and scholars at Catholic universities. What is the impact on academic integrity when new faculty members fear that they might be denied tenure, or get their university in trouble with a bishop, if they publish ideas or speak to the media about controversial topics?[20]

That's not a perception or reputation we can afford. In the face of such real and perceived realities, the Mercy values can save us. We must allow our Mercy values to shape the Catholic identity of our colleges and universities. Only then will the promotion of academic freedom—alongside respectful dialogue with the Church—finally demonstrate that our colleges and universities are truly places where faith and reason can flourish *together*.

Conclusion

We speak with a profound sense of urgency and believe we represent the voices of many of our peers across the country in Catholic/Mercy institutions and beyond. The impasses we face at the myriad intersections we have attempted to make visible must be both honored

[20] Jamie L. Manson, "As Culture War Rages, What's the Status of LGBT Rights on Catholic Campuses?" *Religion Dispatches*, March 30, 2012, http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/sexandgender/5730/as_culture_war_rages,_what%E2%80%99s_the_status_of_lgbt_rights_on_catholic_campuses.

and engaged. We call upon all committed to the flourishing of our Catholic and Mercy identities to act. Leadership in our institutions must facilitate open and honest dialogue within our respective campus communities about the political, ecclesial, and theological conflicts we are facing. Guidelines and concrete strategies for moving forward, beyond the impasses, must be developed in concert with local ordinaries and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The status quo is unacceptable.* We have an obligation to those who have gone before us in Mercy to keep *both* our heritage *and* our Catholic identity robust and credible amid the conflicting worldviews we share—while at the same time we vigorously work to create spaces where intellectual exploration and creative expression can flourish. May the combined wisdom of the magisterium and the intellectual and spiritual depth within our college and university communities prevail—at the intersection of Catholic and Mercy.

Session #3

MERCY SPIRITUALITY, THE FOUNDATION FOR COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

Sister Leona Misto, Ed.D.,
Vice President for Mission Integration and Planning

"If we are humble and sincere, God will finish in us the work He has begun. He never refuses His grace to those who ask it."

Mercy spirituality is the core of my life. In this personal reflection on mercy as the foundation for compassionate service I begin by describing briefly the events that led to my writing this paper. When I was appointed to the newly created position of Vice President for Mission Integration and Planning at Salve Regina University one of the first things I did was to invite faculty to participate in the 8-day national Collegium which is a joint effort by Catholic colleges and universities to recruit and develop faculty who can articulate and enrich the spiritual and intellectual life of their institutions. Two faculty attended and were so enthusiastic about the experience that they suggested we develop our own mini SRU-Collegium to extend the experience to their colleagues and provide an opportunity to share ideas on Catholic social teaching, preserving the University's Catholic identity and its mission.

I thought it was an excellent idea, so we began our work by setting goals and objectives for a 28-hour retreat which would include community building and discussion of selected readings on Catholicism and Catholic social teaching. The faculty requested that we have a session on mercy and mercy spirituality since our University mission centers on mercy. It was also important to the faculty that we build in time for reflection and meditation.

Various faculty led all of the discussions except for the one on mercy which was assigned to me. What follows here, then, is my reflection on mercy spirituality that I share with faculty at the SRU-Collegium.

If we turn to scripture to find examples of mercy, we discover that the perfect model of mercy is God, who is love. Our merciful actions originate in love: love of God and love of others. Mercy, or loving-kindness,

is giving to others as we ourselves have received.

We learn of God's mercy from countless examples throughout scripture. In Genesis, we read that God called Abram to leave his country and kindred and go to the land that he would show him. God made a Covenant with Abram, promising that his descendants would inherit the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates.

For the people of the Hebrew Scriptures, the concept of covenant was a familiar one that covered all sorts of social transactions such as settling disputes, designating alliances and terminating war; however, something new was introduced when Yahweh made His covenant with Abram, Moses and the People of Israel. Yahweh personalized His covenant. The Lord proclaimed to Moses: "He is a God merciful and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin."[2]

This covenant initiated by Yahweh is often referred to as the "election" of Israel. The election is an act of love on Yahweh's part and is not based on the merits of Israel. This kind of love is known as *hesed*. From the Greek and Latin translations of hesed come the words 'mercy' and 'loving-kindness.'

Very simply put, the concept of *hesed* can best be expressed as the love that a parent has for a child. This love is unconditional, it is ongoing, and it is forgiving. This is Mercy. Each of us has experienced God's mercy in His love for us. For some that mercy has been almost overwhelming, for others it has blossomed gently but surely. This is also what we observe in the acts of love Yahweh showered on the tribe of Israel, when He delivered them from Egypt. Through Yahweh's actions we begin to understand mercy not only as loving-kindness but as liberation and restoration to wholeness. These are the underpinning values of compassionate service. When we encourage faculty and students to practice mercy, we are asking them to engage in the process of liberating others, extending loving-kindness to them and, in doing so, restoring them to wholeness.

Covenant love is also associated with "salvation." We read that, "God so loved the world that God gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life."[3]

In the first letter of St. John we learn that God's love was revealed among us in this way:

> God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that

> He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us. God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them.[4]

This loving-kindness is the heart of compassionate service. It is love, it is relationship, it is giving of ourselves for another.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. An eager young lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life. The answer is to: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with your entire mind; and your neighbor as yourself." This is not the answer the young man was expecting and it unsettles him, so he probes further with the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

If you were reading this parable for the first time you might think at the beginning that the answer to "Who is my neighbor?" is, the man lying wounded on the road is my neighbor. However, by the end of the parable we are no longer looking at the man who is wounded but rather at the person who is acting out of human compassion. The lawyer correctly answers that the neighbor, in this instance, is the one who shows mercy. Mercy calls for action. Mercy is compassion in action. The role of compassion is to suffer with those who suffer regardless of what their suffering may be.

At the beginning of this parable we think the lesson is about what we should do. But in the end we realize it is really about who we are called to be. Of course, we must focus on good actions, but every action springs from an interior disposition. The Christian must first ask: What sort of person should I become? In moral theology this is referred to as "character ethics" or the "ethics of being."[5]

Consequently, we may consider merciful actions as those actions which define who we are.

This parable is not primarily a story about how we should treat others: rather it is the story of our redemption by Christ, the fulfillment of the Covenant between Yahweh and His people. Through Christ's death and resurrection He has liberated us and restored us to wholeness. We are called to follow the actions of the Good Samaritan because it is the retelling of the entire Gospel. The parable is not one among many: it serves as the foundational explanation of the commandment to love one another. It identifies mercy as the condition for salvation, the way to gain eternal life.

This parable is the reenactment of God's Divine Mercy. It is precisely what Jesus accomplishes in the Paschal mystery where He takes upon himself our pain, our brokenness and our sin. He forgives us, restores us to new life and rejoices in the fact that we are now able to live out our vocation to bring God to the world.

This is a large part of what our students are grappling with, how to discover and live out their individual vocations. Learning to render compassionate service can be a tremendous opportunity of growth for them because it embodies the qualities of mercy: forgiveness or relief of suffering, the disposition to kindness, and, through action, restoring another to wholeness. It is through practice that one arrives at a fuller understanding of concepts and theories learned. In a similar manner, we discover who we are and who God is by giving ourselves in loving-service to others. "Unless a grain of wheat shall fall upon the ground and die, it remains but a single grain without life."[6] Faculty and students who engage in compassionate service begin to understand the meaning of this truth.

An example of this is a work of compassionate service designed by some faculty and students from the Business Studies department at Salve Regina University. Three of these faculty participated in the SRU-Collegium experience and each went away with the goal of trying to integrate mercy and mission into some component of her discipline.

One faculty member teaches Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS) courses in Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, and Outlook. Students who successfully complete any one or more of the courses become Microsoft Certified. We have in Newport, R.I., several agencies that provide various services to economically deprived persons and so our Microsoft Certified faculty member arranged for Salve students to engage in a community service outreach project by teaching the MOUS courses to persons from the Martin Luther King Community Center. The goal was to train Newport County residents to become proficient in the Microsoft applications needed to successfully enter or re-enter the workforce.

With supervision, the MOUS certified students provided one-on-one mentoring, two hours a week, to ten Newport County residents for fifteen weeks. At the end of this time the residents could take a MOUS examination to become Microsoft certified. As the MOUS training progressed, students from the Marketing Club, advised by another faculty member, decided that they could help with this project by providing a class

on job-interviewing techniques and proper dress for the interview. These students went so far as to raise money to give each successful candidate a $100 gift certificate to the T.J. Maxx store to purchase an appropriate outfit for the interview.

A third group of students involved in another business program learned of this effort from their professor and decided to lend their help by offering to teach a session on how to prepare a resumé. These students made sure that the clients included Microsoft Certified Application Specialist on their resumés. This is the perfect example of a group of people who wanted to express loving-kindness to others and in doing so helped to liberate them and restore them to wholeness.

When the faculty were asked about this project, their response was, "...this is so meaningful and such a neat way to integrate mercy and the mission into what we teach. We love doing this; it's so much fun."

At the first Mercy Symposium held at Salve Regina University in April 2008, the faculty involved in this effort presented a paper on the experience and other projects that they are working on. They are spreading the word that compassionate service can be a component of every academic department.

When we consider mercy in this perspective, we begin to realize that mercy spirituality is distinctive; it is unique. The spirituality of the Sisters of Mercy has always been significantly different from that of every other religious congregation. Catherine McAuley, drawn by God to continue His work of mercy, looked outward at the world around her, saw the great need of people suffering from physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional pain and responded with her all.

Catherine's Religious Institution centers on the works of mercy. Her legacy and her spirituality reflect this characteristic. First and foremost, but not surprisingly, mercy spirituality focuses on the poor in whom we find Christ. The Sisters of Mercy, in addition to taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, take a vow of service to the poor, sick and uneducated. Catherine McAuley had a deep concern for the poor, especially for young, unemployed women who had few skills and usually no place to live. She knew from her own experience of being orphaned at a young age that it was not enough to give handouts to the poor. The poor needed more than that. Her dream was to build a House of Mercy for homeless women with space for a classroom for poor children to receive an education.

In focusing on the poor, Catherine instructed the sisters that, "It is better to relieve a hundred imposters than to suffer one truly deserving person to be sent away empty." [7] There is a story told about how Catherine took great pains to care for an elderly woman who was most ungrateful and actually quite rude to Catherine while she was caring for her. The young sisters questioned Catherine about persisting in this ministry and her response was, "Mercy receives the ungrateful again and again and is never weary of pardoning them." She is also quoted as saying, "It is for God we serve the poor not for thanks."[8]

Another distinction of mercy spirituality is that it introduced a synthesis of contemplation and action[9] that Catherine modeled for the congregation and which is its core of strength. Catherine knew that however well-intentioned or prepared her sisters might be in their apostolic works, they would not succeed without a prayer life rooted in union with God.

Catherine's own spirituality was thoroughly centered in Jesus Christ. As a young girl, her favorite prayer was the Psalter of Jesus which she recited every day. Later in her life, when she was asked about the qualities required to be a "Sister of Mercy" she responded, "...the applicant must have an ardent desire to be united to God and to serve the poor."[10]

Catherine instructed the sisters to consider prayer and service as reciprocal dimensions of spirituality. She said, "Our center is God, the source from whom all our actions should spring." Catherine realized that some of the young sisters found the practice of prayer and service very difficult. In a letter she wrote to Sister Mary de Sales, who was anxious about being sent to a new foundation, she explained in a very gentle, playful way the importance of integrating action and contemplation:

> My Dearest Sister de Sales, I think sometimes our passage through this dear sweet world is something like the Dance called "right and left." You and I have crossed over, changed places - your set is finished- for a time you'll dance no more- but I have to continue. I'll have to curtsie and bow, in Birr – to change corners – going from the one I am in to another, take hands of everyone who does me the honor – and end the figure by coming back to my own place. I'll then have a Sea Saw dance to Liverpool – and a Merry Jig that has a stop in Birmingham- and, I hope a second to Bermondsey – when you, Sister Xavier and I will join hands and dance the Duval Trio back on the same ground. [11]

At first glance, this writing may seem a little frivolous, but it is followed by another paragraph that puts the situation into perspective and explains Catherine's desire that her Sisters integrate contemplation and action. She writes, "We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God – for whom alone we go forward – or stay back."[12] This letter to Sister de Sales demonstrates the great balance between contemplation and action that Catherine possessed in her own apostolic spirituality and which she encouraged others to seek.

Our challenge today is to help faculty and students in a similar way. Amid all the preparation for teaching classes, committee meetings, advising sessions, sports and other activities, how can we keep our thoughts and hearts always in the same place, centered on our mission to be merciful, which propels us to go forward? In our effort to accomplish this balance we refer again to St. John's letter. "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."[13]

In the midst of our busy lives of rushing and tripping about we must constantly seek to find the center of our beings and the core of our spirituality. This is both the foundation and the fruit of compassionate service.

The third characteristic of mercy spirituality, which is also a prerequisite of compassionate service, is that it reflects God's loving-kindness. We are told that one of Catherine's favorite scripture passages was Matthew 25: 35-40 concerning the Last Judgment, where we read "... just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." This parable is somewhat like the one of the Good Samaritan in the sense that everyone is surprised by the conclusion. The righteous people never realized that in showing kindness by feeding the hungry, they were feeding the king, and so on. Likewise and unfortunately the others never realized that through their lack of kindness and by not visiting the sick, they were not visiting the Lord. They were all astonished.

A Salve graduate who is living this parable today is Leila de Bruyne. In her first year at Salve, Leila took a course titled "Children: a Global Perspective" which moved her so much that she began searching for an orphanage to visit. Via the Internet, she found a place called By Grace, an orphanage in the outskirts of Nairobi run by an African woman. That

summer, Leila and her sister spent three weeks in Kenya at the orphanage.

Leila was so overwhelmed by the plight of the hundred plus children she encountered that she began raising money to purchase necessities such as running water and electricity for them. With the help of her classmates, she raised over $50,000 in her sophomore year. Then, she and four classmates returned to By Grace for two months, armed and ready to make major improvements.

When she returned to the orphanage for the third summer, she became acutely aware that even with all the improved conditions as a result of their work, the children were not making significant progress in their health. Because of the crowding, the lack of facilities to boil water and the pollution of the city, many of the children were sick on a continuous basis. Added to this, there was a high crime rate in this section of the city, the price of grain was increasingly rising and fresh vegetables were virtually nonexistent. By Grace had no way whatsoever to supplement their source of income or move towards a sustainable future.

When Leila returned to school for her senior year she started a 501-c3 registered charity called Flying Kites. She envisioned an orphanage outside of the city on a parcel of land near a water source where children and staff could grow their own vegetables. Upon graduation, Leila and one other graduate made a yearlong commitment to establishing such an orphanage. They returned to Africa to find a piece of fertile land in the mountains.

It is clear that God was directing them because they became aware of a retired businessman who owned just such a piece of land and he was willing to donate his five acres to Flying Kites. Leila then purchased the adjoining four acres and began the process of obtaining a permit to build a large house. There is now an existing house on one parcel of land and as of this time they have adopted twelve children. Four permanent staff members care for the children and the land.

Leila is overseeing the orphanage and raising money for all that they will need to do to make this a sustainable project. She believes that there has to be a better way in this world to show love to these children and she is committed to building a model of childcare that will be innovative both environmentally and socially. Leila is living out the message: "Whatever you do to the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me."

Through Leila and her compassionate service, these children are experiencing the love of God. They are being restored to wholeness. If you want to learn more about this project the Web site is *flyingkiteskenya.org.*

There are many ways to reflect on charity and loving-kindness; St. Paul does it best when he writes: "Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never ends".[14]

This virtue of charity was so important to Catherine McAuley that she devoted an entire chapter to it in the *Holy Rule* of her religious community.

In reflecting on the virtue of mercy, then, we have noted its components of liberation, loving-kindness and restoration. So, too, mercy spirituality has these three components: it focuses on the poor and the broken-hearted in order to find ways to liberate them, it reflects God's loving-kindness and it combines contemplation with action to create a strong base from which to restore others to wholeness. Mercy spirituality is about encountering the love of God. The love of God makes possible the love of self and these together make possible the love of neighbor.

This is how mercy spirituality becomes the foundation of compassionate service. When we reflect on the qualities of liberation, loving-kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and service, we come to a clearer understanding of the purpose of our lives. Those of us who serve in Mercy institutions of higher education have been graced and blessed with a spirituality that binds us as we journey together under the loving care of Divine Mercy in whom we live and move and have our being.

NOTES

[1] Thoughts from the Spiritual Conferences of Mother M. Catherine McAuley (Dublin), 7

[2] Exodus 34:6-7

[3] John 3:16

[4] 1 John 3:9-16

[5] Richard Gula,SS, Reason Informed By Faith (Paulist Press), 7

[6] John 12:24

[7] Thoughts from the Spiritual Conferences of Mother M. Catherine McAuley (Dublin), 46

[8] Ibid, 58

[9] M. Angela Bolster, RSM, Catherine McAuley Venerable for Mercy (Dominican Publications), 104

[10] Mary C. Sullivan, The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley (Four Courts Press), 77

[11] Ibid, 332

[12] Ibid, 333

[13] 1 John 4:11-12

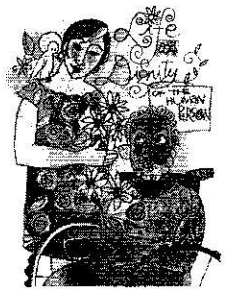
[1] 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

The Works of Mercy, by Jen Norton

CST 101 THEMES FROM

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents. In these brief reflections, we highlight several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

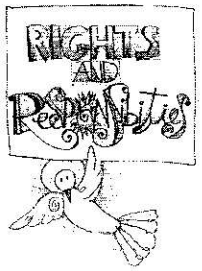


LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. Human life is threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.



RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

SOLIDARITY

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Blessed Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice."[1] The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

[1] Paul VI, For the Celebration of the Day of Peace (Rome: January 1, 1972).

17US495

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

Sisters of Mercy
CRITICAL CONCERNS

The Sisters of Mercy were founded out of a deep concern for persons who are poor. Today, that commitment is focused in five "critical concerns" that we address through prayer; attention to personal, communal and institutional choices; education; advocacy with legislators and other government leaders; and corporate engagement.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR JUSTICE WORK AT:

www.sistersofmercy.org

JOIN IN OUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS AND SIGN UP FOR EMAIL ALERTS ON ANY OR ALL OF THESE CRITICAL CONCERNS.

www.sistersofmercy.org/advocacysignup

Earth

We believe in the need to work toward the sustainability of life and support movements and legislation that secure the fundamental right to water for everyone, and that address climate change. That leads us to examine our own behaviors and policies and to adopt more environmentally sustainable practices. We also advocate against hydrofracking; against mining that impacts indigenous and impoverished communities; for regulations that protect land, air and water; and for national and international agreements that mitigate climate change and ensure support for those most vulnerable to its effects.

Immigration

We reverence the dignity of each person and believe everyone has the right to a decent home, livelihood, education and healthcare. In the United States we work for just and humane immigration laws, a reduction in deportations that tear families apart, and an end to the detention bed quota. We look at the root causes of immigration, including U.S. policies that contribute to the economic and social conditions that push people to flee their countries, and the global impact of migration through our reality as an international community of women religious.

Nonviolence

We work for peace through prayer, education, and personal and communal practices of nonviolence. We support nuclear disarmament, reduction of arms, and the use of dialogue instead of armed conflict. We work to prevent domestic violence and abuse of women and children, stop human trafficking and reduce violence in our communities. That leads us to advocate for commonsense gun violence prevention legislation, an end to the death penalty, an end to the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, and dialogue with Syria and Iran.

Racism

We believe racism is an evil affecting us all. We work to mobilize sisters and associates in recognizing and dismantling institutional racism in order to become an anti-racist multicultural community. We advocate for upholding the voting rights of marginalized Americans and for a fair criminal justice system, and point out racism wherever it exists.

Women

We believe that women's education, health and spirituality need special attention. We continue this mission in our schools, colleges, health-care institutions and spirituality centers. We advocate for equal pay, for services for domestic violence victims, and for the rights of girls and women in especially repressive societies.

Session #4

Catherine McAuley and the Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education

Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., Ph.D.

The characteristics of Mercy higher education as Catherine McAuley would have envisioned them in the context of the educational institutions she created and promoted in her day, and as she would, I believe, elaborate and slightly adjust these characteristics in response to the needs and circumstances of today deserve the careful discernment you have begun. Creative fidelity to the values in the Mercy heritage bequeathed to us by God through Catherine McAuley involves both knowing her contextualized philosophy and theology of education, as revealed in her instructions and practice, and interpreting her views in the context of present realities.

Among Catherine's enduring educational values are, I believe, the following:

- The dignity to be accorded each student and educational coworker
- The fundamental necessity of Christian learning and spiritual development
- A special concern, in learning and practice, for those who suffer material poverty
- A persistent effort to diminish all sorts of debilitating ignorance
- The primacy to be always given to mercifulness and spiritual consolation
- The demanding effort to "practice what we teach/preach," i.e., to be ourselves, personally and institutionally, insofar as humanly possible, examples of the Mercy heritage we claim to promote and transmit

Creative fidelity to the values in the Mercy heritage bequeathed to us by God through Catherine McAuley involves both knowing her contextualized philosophy and theology of education, as revealed in her instructions and practice, and interpreting her views in the context of present realities.

In developing these Mercy values, I will be referring to Catherine McAuley's writings, particularly her Rule, her letters, and her "Spirit of the Institute" essay; her own practice as recorded in the early annals and biographical manuscripts about her; and the recent discussion document of the CMHE, "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics" (Winter 2004). I will attempt to say in more concrete language what Catherine McAuley would now mean by the abstract words "Mercy mission and values," "Mercy heritage," "the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy," and "the prevailing values of the Mercy charism."

In *The Fire in These Ashes,* Joan Chittister explains the Irish practice of *griosach*: the domestic practice in Ireland of "burying [the] warm coals [of the hearth] in ashes at night in order to preserve the fire for the cold morning to come" (Chittister 36).[1] Irish people have long had this tradition of preserving live coals under beds of ashes at night in order to start the new fire the next morning.

When the House of Mercy on Baggot Street—the original convent of the Sisters of Mercy—was first occupied, it was still in an unfinished state. Catherine herself slept in a dormitory room with seven others, including three children. The Derry Manuscript tells us that

> The sitting room and oratory was the room fronting Herbert St. between the great Hall and the private staircase, and was both plainly and scantily furnished . . . Recreation was held on the great

> corridor [across the front of the house], where during the winter months a fire was lighted.[2]

From this hearth—at the center of the house Catherine built for "the purposes of charity"—flowed warmth for all who entered or lived in the house. But the great fire of the house came not from this hearth, but from Christ. It was the zealous fire that her friend Michael Blake recognized in the heart of Catherine McAuley: "the charity of the Redeemer, whose all consuming fire burn[ed] within her."[3]

Deep inside each Mercy institution today are the live coals of Catherine McAuley's charity, her realization that the Mercy of God both precedes and supports, and is in some way dependent upon our own mercifulness. We are the beneficiaries of God's Mercy as well as the instruments of that Mercy to others. The Mercy of God, extended to us and to all God's people, is thus an extremely fundamental reality for Sisters of Mercy and the institutions they sponsor. Indeed, we recognize that the following of God's own mercifulness is the defining demand placed upon our corporate and personal lives.

I. The original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy, which Catherine herself composed, is preserved in Dublin in a manuscript in her own handwriting. In composing her Rule, Catherine used the Rule of the Presentation Sisters (hereafter: PR) as her point of departure—sometimes copying it verbatim; sometimes altering it by the addition or deletion of words, phrases, sentences and even whole paragraphs; and sometimes writing new chapters. When one compares the two Rules, word for word, one sees Catherine's mind and heart very deliberately engaged. One sees the conscious editorial choices she made about what to include, what to exclude, and what to say to those who would follow her.

I would like to focus initially on chapters 1 and 2 of the Rule, "Of the Object of the Institute" and "Of the Schools."[4] As I do so, you will need to mentally translate Catherine's nineteenth-century theological language into twentieth-century terms. Chapter 1, article 1, says:

> The Sisters admitted into this religious congregation besides the principal and general end of all religious orders . . . must also have in view what is peculiarly characteristic of this Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, that is, a most serious application to the Instruction of poor Girls, Visitation of the Sick, and protection of distressed women of good character. (1.1)

There is in our founding a persistent strand of special concern for women and young girls that has never been muted or weakened, even though we recognize, as Catherine did on other occasions, that debilitating ignorance, poverty and distress afflict both sexes. Catherine's keen awareness that women and girls bear particularly acute and central burdens in situations of poverty and suffering is an enduring insight on her part, no doubt derived from her own experience of walking the streets, visiting the sick poor, tending the dying, and answering knocks on the door. It was one of her founding inspirations to perceive in a special way the added depth in the poverty of women and girls and to be moved to relieve it by establishing schools for poor girls and employment training for homeless women.

Here are two key themes in the theology of Catherine McAuley: first, the example of Jesus Christ and the animating effect it should have on the character of one's daily life; and, second, Jesus Christ's own declaration that he is identified with the poor.

Catherine recognized the "arduous" nature of the work of Mercy education. In article 2 of the first chapter, she states what she believed was the most basic and sustaining motivation of those who teach. She writes:

> In undertaking the arduous, but very meritorious duty of instructing the Poor, the Sisters . . . shall animate their zeal and fervor by the example of . . . Jesus Christ, who testified on all occasions a tender love for the Poor and declared that He would consider as done to Himself whatever should be done unto them. (1.2)

Here are two key themes in the theology of Catherine McAuley: first, the example of Jesus Christ and the animating effect it should have on

the character of one's daily life; and, second, Jesus Christ's own declaration that he is identified with the poor, that what is done to or for them is done to or for him.

It is not possible to overstress the decisive force in Catherine McAuley's life of the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40: "Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers and sisters you do unto me." She deliberately inserts Matthew 25:40 twice in the Rule; and this scriptural passage is the key to interpreting her understanding of the works of mercy, including the work of education: that is, in teaching others we are indeed teaching those with whom Jesus Christ is profoundly identified.

Catherine begins her major statement about Mercy education—her chapter 2, "Of the Schools"—with the following article, taken verbatim from the Presentation Rule:

> The Sisters appointed by the Mother Superior to attend the Schools shall with all zeal, charity and humility, purity of intention and confidence in God undertake the charge and cheerfully submit to every labor and fatigue annexed thereto, mindful of their vocation and of the glorious recompense attached to the faithful discharge of this duty. (2.1)

The Sisters are to pray to God and to Mary, the model of faith and service, *before* they enter school, not *when* they enter; the kind of prayer Catherine advocated could be done only privately.

Here we note five virtues to which Catherine refers over and over in her Rule, letters, and other writings: *zeal, charity, humility, purity of intention,* and *confidence in God.* In her view, it is these attitudes, born of reflection on the example of Jesus Christ, which make it possible to "undertake the charge and cheerfully submit to every labor and fatigue" (2.1) related to the work of Mercy education. Clare Augustine Moore—an associate of Catherine's on Baggot Street—once wrote: "I cannot say that our dear foundress had a talent for education; she doated [sic] on children and invariably spoiled them . . ."[5] I am more inclined to think that what Clare Augustine saw was Catherine's immense love for her students, her zeal for their development, her humility and purity of heart before them, and her absolute confidence in God's ultimate care of them. In a harsh and destitute age, Catherine was never above a little tenderness and doting.

She addresses the content of Mercy education in the next three articles in the chapter "Of the Schools." In each case, she alters the texts in the PR in ways true to her own spirit. Article 2 begins:

> Before the Sisters enter School they shall raise their hearts to God and to the Queen of Heaven, recommending themselves and the children to their care and protection. (2.2)

Catherine's alteration of this sentence as it appears in the PR (2.3) is noteworthy. The Sisters are to pray to God and to Mary, the model of faith and service, *before* they enter school, not *when* they enter; the kind of prayer Catherine advocated could be done only privately, in anticipation of the attitudes and practice to which the example of Jesus Christ calls and with deep remembrance of his presence in those about to be served. She does not say, as did the PR, that the Sisters are to "salute with all reverence interiorly the Guardian Angels of the children" or recommend "themselves, and the dear little ones to [the Angels'] care and protection." Her own kindly Protestant associations, over the whole course of her adult life, would have made her reluctant to be too elaborate about Guardian Angels.

In this paragraph, Catherine uses the verb *inspire*, as in the PR: "They shall endeavour to inspire [their students] with a sincere Devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ, to His Real Presence in the Most Holy Sacrament, [and] to the Immaculate Mother of God . . ." (2.2). In this sentence are three key elements of her faith and catechesis: the Death and Resurrection of Christ; the Eucharist; and the special discipleship of Mary of Nazareth. To these three themes she will devote two entire chapters later in the Rule.

To Mercy educators of the twenty-first century, this paragraph says a number of enduring things: about the primacy of *Christian religious education* in our ministry; about what ought to be the genuinely *inspiring*—that is, the life-sustaining, and life-influ-

encing—character of the religious education we offer our students; and about three *essential theological emphases* in any Mercy institution that hopes to be faithful to the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy: namely, a realization of what the death and resurrection of Jesus means for those we serve and for their brothers and sisters in this world; an appreciation of what the Eucharist can be for them and their friends; and an understanding of what Christian faith and hope really are, as seen in the life of Mary of Nazareth. Catherine McAuley would, of course, rejoice in modern biblical scholarship and modern theology, which reveal the even greater richness of these crucial mysteries.

Article 3 of this chapter on the Schools addresses the teaching of prayer. Here Catherine writes:

> The Sisters shall teach the children to offer their hearts to God when they awake in the morning . . . [and] return thanks for all His favors . . . They shall instruct them how to direct all their thoughts, words, and actions to God's glory, implore His grace to know and love Him, and to fulfill His Commandments, how to examine their conscience, and to honor and respect Parents and Superiors. (2.3)

Catherine's simplicity in her treatment of prayer leads to a number of alterations in the PR text. For example, she does not say: "teach the children to offer themselves up to God from the first use of Reason," as in the PR (1.3). As the adoptive mother of at least nine children before she ever thought of founding a religious Congregation, her understanding of human development was much more subtle, and her theological expressions were always humanly sensible. She simply wishes us to teach others how to pray in light of God's present and future gifts to them. Catherine does not propose teaching students to examine their consciences "every night," as does the PR, but simply *how* to do so—implying that, whether young or old, they will, on their own, discover when such examination is needed.

What is most important about this article on teaching others how to pray is the fact that Catherine includes it in her Rule as one of only three articles on the content of Mercy education, thus giving to *instruction in prayer* a priority that she does not give to other topics.

In Article 4, she writes, in part:

> They shall teach them the method of assisting devoutly at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, how to prepare for Confession, and be ever attentive to dispose them for the Sacrament of Confirmation, and for Holy Communion . . . The Angelus and Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity being said, general instructions shall be given by an appointed Sister for about half an hour, adapted to their state and capacity and rendered practically useful by explanation. (2.4)

Three aspects of this article are significant: first, Catherine asks the Sisters to teach "the method of assisting devoutly at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," a detail entirely missing from the PR (1.4); she changes the PR reference about disposing the children for their "first Communion" to their recurring need to dispose themselves for "Holy Communion"; and finally she says that the instruction given should be "adapted to their state and capacity and rendered practically useful by explanation" (2.4).

Catherine does not propose teaching students to examine their consciences "every night," as does the PR, but simply *how* to do so—implying that, whether young or old, they will, on their own, discover when such examination is needed.

Catherine concludes her chapter, "Of the Schools," with a final paragraph that is entirely her own composition. She writes:

> The Sisters shall feel convinced that no work of charity can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the poor than the careful instruction of women, since whatever be the station they are destined to fill, their example and advice will always possess influence, and wherever a religious woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found. (2.5)

Here, "religious woman" refers, not to a woman with religious vows, but to any woman (and by extension any man) who has been so empowered by "careful," that is, by mature and life-giving, religious instruction that her or his influence is "productive of good to society" and "conducive to the

happiness of the Poor." Where such a person presides "peace and good order are generally to be found." Like other articles in the chapter "Of the Schools," this paragraph is a great challenge to the work of Mercy education. It calls for continual re-imagining of the scope and outreach of this work of mercy.

In Ireland in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much of the Roman Catholic population generally suffered the illiteracy, deep ignorance, poverty, and demoralization that were the long-lasting, apartheid-like effects of the penal laws against Catholics enacted by England between 1695 and 1720. The Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke (1729–1797) once called the penal laws, "a system of wise and elaborate contrivance, as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man."[6] The "relief acts" between 1778 and 1829 repealed the various penal laws, but by then enduring damage had already been done to the Irish Catholic population.

In Carlow, Cork, and Naas, Catherine encouraged the establishment of pension (i.e., tuition) schools for girls whose parents could afford to pay for their daughters' education, poor girls being already well served by the Presentation Sisters in Carlow and Cork.

It was into such a world, with all its neglect of poor children and poor families, that Catherine McAuley deliberately took up the work of instructing poor girls and sheltering and training homeless girls and women—first in Dublin and later in other cities in Ireland and England.

She created a school for poor girls and an employment training shelter for homeless women at Baggot Street. Of the education of the women in the House of Mercy she wrote: they shall "be instructed in the principal mysteries of Religion," and prepared "to approach the Holy Sacraments." She noted further that "Suitable employment shall be sought for and great care taken to place them in situations for which they are adapted," since "Many leave their situations not so much for want of merit as incapacity to fulfill the duties they unwisely engaged in."[7] She also built a commercial laundry where the women could train for employment other than household service.

Catherine urged Mercy poor schools to affiliate with the Board of National Education. Such affiliation required teacher certification, school inspections, and observance of the board's regulations, but it also made the schools eligible for national grants. In her lifetime, the poor schools in Dublin, Limerick, and Tullamore all achieved this affiliation.

In Carlow, Cork, and Naas, Catherine encouraged the establishment of pension (i.e., tuition) schools for girls whose parents could afford to pay for their daughters' education, poor girls being already well served by the Presentation Sisters in Carlow and Cork. The Carlow pension school opened in May 1839, and the Carlow Annals for that year reports: "Although properly speaking the education of the middle class is not a feature of our Institute, yet our venerated Foundress gave her fullest sanction to its being undertaken by this Community."[8] Writing to the superior in Cork in October 1839, Catherine said:

> The pension school in Carlow is making great progress. You must get their regulations—it is quite simple . . . The girls are obliged to acquire a perfect knowledge of the lessons at home—so that to hear the classes is all—one the French class, another Grammar & Geography, [and] so on. They have already commenced at Naas and have 18 pupils—also a poor school.[9]

Some early Sisters of Mercy, notably the superiors in Kinsale, Limerick, New York, San Francisco, and St. Louis, were strenuously opposed to Mercy pension schools, as incompatible with the emphasis on poor students in the Rule. Mary Francis Bridgeman of Kinsale argued this view in the *Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, which she drafted and which was approved by a gathering of *some* Mercy superiors in Limerick in 1864 and published in 1866.

However, the *Customs and Minor Regulations of the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy, in . . . Baggot Street, and its Branch Houses*, published in Dublin in 1869—apparently the long-delayed result of a much earlier meeting planned for superiors in Dublin in the late 1840s—states that:

> Our Venerated Foundress, in naming the Works of Mercy peculiar to the Congregation did not in any way exclude such other good works as circumstances in various places might make desirable . . .
>
> . . . Sisters of Mercy . . . are dedicated to the exercise of the Works of Mercy, and should not, *on principle*, exclude any one of them, unless . . . it practically interferes with those characteristic of the Congregation.[10]

Over time and in various places, as "circumstances" made desirable, evolved not only tuition schools, including our present Mercy colleges and universities, but also schools for boys, infant schools, coeducational schools, and educational programs for adults. In England, the convents in both Birmingham and Bermondsey, London, developed some of these Mercy endeavors very early in their histories, while maintaining their commitment to the instruction of poor girls and women.

II. But how did Catherine McAuley think Mercy education occurs? And what in her view was the overriding purpose of Mercy education? Catherine's response to the first question involves a "method" that requires a lifetime of human effort, as well as God's help. The method is *good example*—that is, a Mercy educator's own evident practice of what she or he teaches.

Throughout her Rule, her letters, and her other writings, Catherine repeatedly urges the necessity of our being an *example* of what we propose to teach. Her most fully developed statement on this topic occurs at the end of her handwritten essay on the "Spirit of the Institute." This essay is her much abbreviated and frequently altered transcription of a treatise in Alonso Rodriguez's work, *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection*, first published in Spain in the early seventeenth century.

In her essay, Catherine makes Rodriguez's thoughts and convictions her own, often omitting passages, altering words, and inserting phrases and sentences that are her own composition. In her two paragraphs on the benefit and necessity of giving good example, she says:

> I shall now speak of the most effectual means of rendering ourselves useful to our neighbour . . . The first means which the saints have recommended to render us most useful to others is to give good example and to live in sanctity. Saint Ignatius says . . . "the good example which we give by leading a most holy and Christian life has the greatest power over the minds of others . . . It was for this reason that our Blessed Saviour marked the way to Heaven by His example. "Jesus Christ," says Saint Luke, "began to do and to teach" (Act. 1.1), thus signifying to us that we should do first what we would induce others to do . . . the way to virtue and to piety is shorter by example than by precept. Saint Bernard speaking on this matter says, "Example is very efficacious and a very proper lesson to persuade because it proves that what it teaches is practicable and this is what has most influence on all."
>
> "Our weakness is so great," says Saint Augustine, "that we can hardly be moved to do what is right, except we see others do it . . ."[11]

The challenge these words present to Mercy educators may not have fully dawned upon us. We are to *be* and *do* what we *teach*. If we wish to teach mercifulness, we must speak and act mercifully towards others.

The challenge these words present to Mercy educators may not have fully dawned upon us. We are to *be* and *do* what we *teach*. If we wish to teach mercifulness, we must speak and act mercifully towards others. If we wish to teach forgiveness, we must forgive others and ask for their forgiveness. If we wish to teach that the Eucharist is Christ's life-nourishing, joyous gift to the whole community, the Eucharist must be evidently nourishing and joyous in our own lives and institutions. If we wish to teach others to serve and respect those who are economically poor, we must first serve and respect them ourselves. This is the primary principle and method of Mercy education as Catherine McAuley conceived and practiced it.

In Catherine's view, and in the view of the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament writers, the overriding purpose of every educational endeavor which seeks to be faithful to the revelation of God, is *consolation*; yes, consolation. The primary purpose of all teaching that is born of God, the Supreme Educator, is to console, to comfort. Thus, for Catherine, the purpose of all Mercy education is not primarily to develop students' intellectual skills, or to teach them information and formulas—however necessary and valuable such learning may be in their lives—but to comfort, encourage, and console them in the most thorough and lasting way possible. To assure them that the God of all Consolation has already visited them and uplifted them; that God has embraced and loved them forever; that the Spirit of God is always with them, encouraging, consoling, and helping in whatever grief, affliction, or weakness they may now or one day experience.

The primary purpose of all teaching that is born of God, the Supreme Educator, is to console, to comfort.

Catherine McAuley believed that the deepest ignorance of those we instruct is spiritual: their lack of awareness of the reality of God's Merciful Consolation. Her understanding of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ lay behind her understanding and practice of mercy; it urged her, in her own words, "to instruct and *comfort* the sick and dying poor" (Rule 3.1), to give herself "to the instruction and *consolation* of those who required . . . assistance."[12] She also wished to console and encourage Mercy teachers themselves, so she wrote:

> We ought then have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal—which constitute the business of our lives, and assure ourselves that God will particularly concur with us to render them efficacious as by His infinite mercy we daily experience.[13]

III. In the discussion paper titled "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics," prepared as a draft for the Conference in Winter 2004, we read the following:

> While each Mercy institution of higher education has its own mission statement and articulated core values, four characteristics unmistakably define the formative culture of every Mercy campus:
>
> [1] Regard for the dignity of the person
> [2] Academic excellence and life-long learning
> [3] Education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit
> [4] Through action and education, promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less, especially women and children[14]

The Executive Summary of the paper calls these four characteristics "the first attempt to name those qualities which should be the hallmarks of Mercy higher education," and claims that "Anchored in these four characteristics, the culture of a Mercy college or university endeavors to witness its Catholic identity and to honor its Mercy heritage."[15]

With some modification, I accept these four characteristics. However, in light of the founding views of Catherine McAuley that I have discussed, and allowing for some slight extension of her views in accord with evolving theological, ecumenical, and interfaith understandings as well as present economic and social circumstances, I would like to suggest the addition of three more characteristics, or at least the addition of more explicit language to the four characteristics already listed.

A fifth characteristic of Mercy higher education I would propose is the following:

> [5] Religious learning and spiritual development, through frequent courses in Christian theology and the Scriptures, courses in other religions, Catholic liturgical celebrations, and other religious events

I do not believe that the wording, "education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit," is adequate to represent this central element in the Mercy heritage coming to us from Catherine McAuley. While Catherine herself would, I believe, have surely embraced the ecumenical and interfaith respect, aspirations, and understandings of the present time, she would not wish such desirable collaboration and co-learning to silence or diminish a courteous emphasis on and provision for explicitly Christian and,

where necessary, Catholic religious education and experience. Such emphasis was the primary, though not the only, characteristic of her practice of the works of mercy, including the work of education.

There is a gracious way for a Mercy college or university both to respect whatever interdenominational and interfaith profile its students, faculty, and staff may have *and* to provide through its curricula and extracurricular programs explicit opportunities for sharing its heritage of Christian-Catholic learnings and practices, including the sacraments. Excellent religion courses—Christian theology courses as well as courses in, for example, Islam, Jewish theology, and philosophy of religion—would seem to be a necessary hallmark of a Mercy institution, as would frequent opportunities for well-celebrated liturgies, paraliturgies, spiritual retreats, and other Christian events and experiences. If one reads the chapter "Of the Schools" in Catherine's Rule with some depth of analysis, one can see that Christian religious education, including instruction in the major Christian mysteries and sacraments, and care to promote experiences of Christian prayer were very important emphases in the educational practices she wished to see in Mercy schools.

A sixth characteristic I would propose for Mercy higher education is an explicit focus on God's Mercy and our call to mercifulness, as, for instance, in the following wording:

[6] Education in and a commitment to mercifulness, as revealed in the Mercy of God made manifest in Jesus Christ

It does not seem possible to me that a college or university that is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy and wishes to consider itself "of Mercy" could so regard itself without aiming to be explicitly attentive to mercifulness in all the myriad ways an institution of higher learning might do so. Mercifulness can be defined as a set of qualities and actions: forgiveness, gentleness, sensitivity, empathy towards distress, charity of mind and heart, sympathy, self-sacrifice for the sake of another's need, loving kindness, humility—all the ways the charity of God expresses itself for our sakes. Catherine McAuley frequently said:

> The Charity of God would not avail us, if His Mercy did not come to our assistance.[16]

and

> The mercy of God comes to our assistance and renders practical His charity in our regard; Mercy not only bestows benefits, but receives and pardons again and again, even the ungrateful; how kind and charitable and merciful, then, ought not Sisters of Mercy to be.[17]

In a Mercy-sponsored institution, this demanding responsibility surely extends to all our coworkers and partners in ministry!

Merciful behavior does not mean that an institution has to lower its academic or grading standards, its dorm rules, or its employee expectations or requirements.

Merciful behavior does not mean that an institution has to lower its academic or grading standards, its dorm rules, or its employee expectations or requirements. Rather, what is involved is the manner of thinking and acting at all levels, the atmosphere of collegial life, the tenor of the campus, the mutual relations, the willingness to listen to and experience the "other side" of situations—the language, the look in the eyes, the presence of compassion. Education in and an explicit commitment to mercifulness will suffuse both the real and the perceived character of the whole place, from the maintenance workers and history professors to the president. Such attention to the Mercy of God and to human mercifulness will even influence, where appropriate, the curricula, the content of courses, and, again where appropriate, their methods and objectives. Such a characteristic of a Mercy college or university will give concrete reality to the vague abstract words we so easily use about ourselves: "Mercy values," "Mercy heritage," "the tradition of Mercy."

My final recommendation is the addition of a seventh characteristic—a much more difficult characteristic than all the rest. An educational institution cannot be faithful to the essential Mercy values and practices coming from Catherine McAuley

without seriously attempting to be faithful to her primary pedagogical principle and method: her belief that "the first means . . . to render us most useful to others" is "to give good example."[18]

Here the proverbial rubber will really hit the road. For example, to aspire to be a culture where there is "regard for the dignity of the person" will make enormous personal and professional demands on each teacher's and administrator's conduct and speech, if this characteristic is to be more than simply boilerplate words in the college or university's mission statement or catalog. And, to be a place of "academic excellence and lifelong learning," it will not be enough to lecture students about this goal; they will need to see in their teachers and the staff, the same ardent and personal pursuit of "academic excellence and lifelong learning."

In a letter to Frances Warde, Catherine once gave the following advice:

> Sister Mary Teresa has delighted me telling of the instructions you give—shew them in your actions as much as you can . . . and your Institution will outdo us all.[19]

Of her own personal efforts to practice what she preached, Catherine once wrote: "she teaches me by her example what genuine meekness and humility are. The adage—'never too old to learn'—is a great comfort to me."[20] If students do not see evidences of the characteristics of a Mercy education in their teachers' example, as well as in their words, such characteristics will be only half affirmed, if at all. The personnel of a true Mercy educational institution will "never be too old" to learn to teach "by example more than by precept . . . and chiefly by example."

So, to the set of characteristics of a Mercy college or university, I would add the following:

[7] The strenuous effort to give good example, by modeling, personally and corporately, all the values it seeks to promote through its educational and other endeavors

It is now morning in the world of Mercy higher education. It is time to brush away the night's ashes and expose more clearly the live coals that have long sustained the life-giving fires of Mercy colleges and universities. These coals are the essential characteristics of a true Mercy education, the specific and enduring educational values of Catherine McAuley embedded in general references to the "Mercy tradition" and the "Mercy heritage." I can only wish you profound fidelity and creativity in this demanding endeavor. May you succeed with God's and Catherine's help and inspiration. Thank you.

Notes

1 Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *The Fire in these Ashes* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 36.
2 Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy.* (Dublin and Notre Dame: Four Courts Press and the University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 49.
3 Ibid., 163.
4 McAuley, Catherine. "Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy" [her handwritten manuscript approved and signed by Daniel Murray on January 23, 1837], in Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* pp. 295–328. References to the Rule are cited by chapter and paragraph, separated by a period.
5 "Memoir," in Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley,* 200.
6 Quoted in Giovanni Costigan, *A History of Modern Ireland* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 91.
7 Rule 4.1, 2, and 3, in Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley,* 299–300.
8 Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley,* 228.
9 Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., ed., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818–1841* (Dublin and Washington, D.C.: Four Courts Press and The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 209.
10 Customs 101–102 in *Customs and Minor Regulations of The Religious Called Sisters of Mercy, in the Parent House, Baggot Street, and its Branch Houses* (Dublin: J. M. O'Toole and Son, 1869).
11 Sullivan, ed., *Correspondence,* 463.
12 "Spirit of the Institute," in Sullivan, ed., *Correspondence* , 460.
13 Ibid., 462.
14 "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics." Discussion Paper. Winter 2004 Draft. Chicago: Conference for Mercy Higher Education, 2004, p. 2.
15 Ibid., 2.
16 Bermondsey Annals, in Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley,* 117.
17 Limerick Manuscript, in Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley,* 181.
18 "Spirit of the Institute," in Sullivan, ed., *Correspondence,* 463.
19 Sullivan, ed., *Correspondence,* 116.
20 Ibid., 105.

Wisdom, Dignity, and Justice
Higher Education as a Work of Mercy

Margaret A. Farley, R.S.M., Ph.D.

My focus in this essay both is on the particularity of a Mercy charism in higher education and also on the way in which this charism belongs to the whole church. Since this is an abridged version of an original paper delivered at a conference on Mercy Higher Education, some of what I say will not be backed by the analysis that I initially tried to provide. Yet my analysis and argument are contained elliptically in my title: "Wisdom, Dignity, and Justice: Higher Education as a Work of Mercy." What I will try to show is the following: (1) Wisdom involves many things, but central to it is a recognition of the dignity of human persons and the value of all creation. (2) Genuine recognition of the dignity of all persons, along with insight into the treasures of the rest of creation, yields imperatives of justice. (3) Justice both calls for and makes possible relationships of compassion or mercy. (4) At its best, higher education aims at wisdom. Along the way, wisdom may be awakened and challenged by the claims of mercy and justice. When wisdom, dignity, justice, and mercy are held together, then higher education can be a work of mercy.

Wisdom

The more skeptical among us might raise our eyebrows at the statement that the central goal of higher education is to grow in wisdom. In a time and society marked by narrow specialization of disciplines, economic pressures, desires not only for survival, but for upward mobility, what even counts as "wisdom"? When trends in higher education seek to accommodate not only new forms of learning but also new challenges to *any* learning that aims at universal theorizing, what might "wisdom" mean? When departments are more and more isolated from one another in colleges and universities, and scholars find it difficult to understand the world through one another's lenses, what kind of "wisdom" might we search for or expect?

I take such questions seriously, but I do not think they undermine a goal of wisdom in higher education. Insofar as the questions reflect extreme forms of deconstruction and distorted desires shaped by multiple culturally hidden forces, they do seem to be conversation stoppers and to render moot any longing for wisdom on which we might base our educational goals. But questions like these may also be a starting point in a search for understanding and wisdom. If, for example, educating in a postmodern world allows us to deconstruct inadequate theoretical idols and illusions of isolated individuality, if it brings us to an appreciation of diversity, engagement with the Other, and humility in the face of the partiality of knowledge, then it may still be education that begins in and aims toward wisdom.

Whatever its ultimate goals, all higher education has importantly to do with the initiation of new generations of persons into a civilization, a culture in which or against which they must find their way. The Greeks educated for virtue and for freedom of intellectual inquiry; the humanists of the Renaissance educated for the reform of society and for individual self-fulfillment; Christians have educated persons in the workings of the world and in the

Whatever its ultimate goals, all higher education has importantly to do with the initiation of new generations of persons into a civilization, a culture in which or against which they must find their way.

relationship of the world to God. None of these educational traditions, nor any combination of them, has ever been divorced from preparing persons to make a living, to enter a career, to advance the skills and services that a society needs.[1] Both theoretically and practically, both individually and communally, higher education has sought to initiate persons into a civilization and a culture through some form of expansion of mind, social analysis, development of skills, experience of relationships, and capacity building for freedom of choice guided by some form of wisdom.

Unlike other strands of Christianity, the Catholic tradition has continued to believe in the basic intelligibility of creation and in the basic capacity of the human mind to understand what is revealed in creation.

The goals of higher education today, insofar as they are adequate, take into account not only relativity in physics, but the culture-bound perspectives of history, literature, psychology and sociology, philosophy and theology. We have learned to value pluralism when it does not mean that "anything goes." We have learned to welcome diversity (or at least we have learned that we ought to welcome it) and to see the possibilities of unity within it. We have learned to value community and the freedom it nurtures. We have experienced the necessity of interdisciplinary study, but also the humility it requires as we realize that everyone knows something that others do not know; and that we will all know more only if we are willing to share our knowledge and our methods.

Real wisdom in every respect comes from learning—through whatever process or with whatever resources—about the interrelationships of all beings and the dignity at the heart of every person. Much of higher education through long centuries of its development has been an attempt to learn just this, but to learn it primarily by studying human achievements—in science, the arts, politics, architecture, the winning of wars and the conquering of territories, the possession of land and the fruits of human labor on the land. Yet as Michael Buckley pointed out in the early 1980s, what was missing from these studies, from this education, was an encounter with human suffering.[2] Learning of human successes without learning of human pain, or learning about conquerors without learning about the exploited and the conquered, learning about the leaders and their ideas without learning about the marginalized and the poor, led and still may lead to the estrangement of an educated elite from the lives of the desperate and from the worldwide phenomenon of human misery.

This has changed (to some extent) in higher education generally since the early '80s, and certainly (again, to some extent) in Catholic higher education. Most colleges and universities at least offer possibilities of community service, urban immersion, and travel that is not only to learn of the glories of human achievement but the need for solidarity between persons in diverse cultures with diverse hopes and needs. Moreover, renewed studies of, for example, the classic content of the humanities, empirical research by social sciences, and humanitarian goals of many of the sciences, open the eyes of students not only to human impoverishment and injustice but to the mystery of the human person—to the dignity, the beauty, and the basic needs of all persons.

Dignity

The Catholic tradition stands out among the multiple traditions of Christianity in that it has sustained a kind of optimism about learning. Unlike other strands of Christianity, it has continued to believe in the basic intelligibility of creation and in the basic capacity of the human mind to understand what is revealed in creation. Although the Catholic tradition, like others, has taken seriously the "human condition" limited by human nature and damaged by human sin, it has never thought that humans are either so limited or so injured and incapacitated that they cannot learn (however partially) about the universe and about humanity itself. Not only the

Bible, but creation itself has been considered a revelatory text.

This learning, the study of this text, is not simple, however. Think of the ways we try to understand the cosmos, the universe, the planet Earth. Think of the academic disciplines we have developed in order to understand the worth of every creature—not only their instrumental worth but their worth in themselves. The motivations for such study may be multiple, but in Catholic education they can include the sort of inquiry that once motivated St. Augustine. Searching for God, Augustine described his questioning of the earth: "What is this God whom I love?" and "Tell me about God, you who are not God." All things on the earth answered him, he said, from the "sea and the deeps and the creeping things with living souls," to the "blowing breezes and the universal air with all its inhabitants," to the "sun, the moon, the stars." "They cried out in a loud voice: 'God made us.'" My question, Augustine said, "was in my contemplation of them, and their answer was in their beauty."[3]

But if study of the world is complex and ongoing, think of the study of ourselves. Discipline after discipline seeks to probe the meaning of the human species and of each human person. The concrete reality of human persons includes multiple elements and dimensions.[4] At least sometimes in our own experience and in our academic explorations, we have glimpsed a core value at the heart of each person, a value that grounds a claim that all of us are ends in ourselves. In this recognition rises the further claim that we are to be treated as ends, not only as means. There are multiple warrants for these claims. One of them is our capacity for free choice. By our freedom, we possess ourselves; our selves and our actions are in an important sense our own. By our freedom, we can determine the meaning of our own lives and, within limits, our destiny.

We are also terminal centers, ends in ourselves, because of what today we call our relationality. We possess ourselves and transcend ourselves not only by our freedom but by our capacities to know and be known, love and be loved. We belong to ourselves yet we belong to others; we are centered both within and without. Each of us is a whole world in herself, yet our world is in what we love.

Freedom and relationality, moreover, do not compete; they are intimately connected. Relationships make freedom of self-determination possible (for without them we cannot grow in freedom); but freedom is ultimately for the sake of choosing relationships—of choosing what and how to love. Herein lies the basis of human dignity and the requirement to grow in wisdom regarding what humans need. Out of wisdom about all the creatures of the world, and especially about human dignity, arise imperatives of human justice.

Freedom and relationality, moreover, do not compete; they are intimately connected. Relationships make freedom of self-determination possible.

Justice

The threads of ideas that I have been trying to identify may now be ready for weaving into a fabric whose background is Catholic and Mercy higher education and whose central design is justice and mercy. Let me come now to the threads of justice.

Justice of course can mean many things. One of the tasks of higher education in initiating persons into civilization and culture is to test the multiple theories of justice that have been proposed through many centuries and in many different cultures. Some of these will prove to have been inadequate, and some of them simply wrong. Some will be more adequate than others.

Examples of theories of justice that cannot be adequate for our society or our church today are theories that accommodate human slavery (a seemingly obvious example), or theories that assume a basic inequality among persons on the basis of race or gender (an example apparently not yet so obvious to everyone).[5] Indeed, we judge such theories to be not only inadequate but wrong. In the past, there were no doubt cultural reasons why such theories were not questioned, but today we (or at least most of us) condemn them as distortions of justice, as theories that actually support and reinforce systemic injustice. When we ask how such views of justice could have held sway for so many centuries and

Institutions of higher learning are vulnerable like all institutions to the culture blindness that is endemic to any given society.

in so many cultures, the only answer can be that the dominant culture found reasons to avert its eyes from the dignity of some human individuals and groups, thereby not recognizing them as human, or at least not fully human. And despite long struggles for a better recognition of this dignity, we, too, still fail in practice if not in theory to oppose and remedy attitudes of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and cultural imperialism—attitudes that continue to exist in societies and in the hearts of countless people, including ourselves.

No one expects higher education to be the sole solution to failures in wisdom and justice. It has not been so in the past, nor is it in the present. Indeed, institutions of higher learning are vulnerable like all institutions to the culture blindness that is endemic to any given society. Yet, higher education is surely that realm of society where primary challenges to failures and distortions of thought ought to be taken seriously. It may even be that realm of society where critical challenges can be formulated for the moral failures that abet distortions of thought (moral failures such as greed, complacency, or the desire for power). Higher education functions, after all, not only to initiate persons into a culture that is already made, but thereby to influence the culture for better or for worse.

Wisdom, human dignity, and justice, therefore, remain not only relevant but crucial to the shaping of higher education. Lest this stand as a platitudinous assertion, let me try a quick thought experiment. Suppose we here today were in a position to found a new college or university; and suppose we knew that our own children or some particular individuals close to us would be the first students in this institution of higher education. What would we want to provide for these students, from their first day of matriculation to their last day before graduation? I will speak for myself, readers can test the plausibility and desirability of what I propose.

I would want these students, my children or my friends, to find first of all an institution that is itself marked by justice. I would want a community of learning in which students could trust the competence of teachers, the care and commitment of teachers, and the extraordinary wisdom of at least some teachers. I would want a college or university in which members of the administration and the staff work together for the same goals and are committed to adjudicating disagreements in ways marked by fairness and due process. I would want an institution in which just wages are paid to everyone, so that faculty, administration, and staff can be free and happy to work for more than their monetary wages. I would want an institution where interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary teaching and learning are rewarded, so that junior faculty will not be penalized for it nor will any student who appreciates its value be deprived of it. I would want an institution in which the students experience harmony, though not necessarily always agreement, among faculty and between faculty and administration; where faculty can recognize administrators as their advocates, not their adversaries; and where administrators can trust faculty, even when they are frustrated by them.

Above all, I would want this institution to be just toward its students. It would give them the education they need and deserve. It would respect and even reverence them—in their diversity, their uniqueness, their plurality of gifts and possibilities. It would therefore aim in its policies, its actions, and its ethos, to nurture the capacities in the students for freedom and for relationship. It would not fear, but rather cultivate, students' possibilities for self-determination and for discerning their responsibilities. It would awaken their desires for union, through knowledge and love, with more and more of what can be learned about the vast reaches of the universe, the microscopic smallness of the tiniest of creatures, the diversity of human cultures and occupations, and human persons as embodied spirits. Each student would be able to encounter at least one teacher who might change their lives, not through indoctrination, but inspiration.

The students would not be living in a paradise, isolated from human misery and pain. No matter how just the institution in which they studied, they would have opportunities to learn to accept human

frailty, and to learn about forgiveness and patience. They would learn, and co-learn, about human sufferings that are a part of embodied life—such as natural disasters, illness, limitations great and small. They would be given the tools to recognize that the future of all of creation is in some way dependent on them—whether in terms of Earth's environment, the intrinsic worth of every being, or the survival of the human species. They would have at least encouragement to learn to see the gem of dignity in each human person, no matter how different from themselves, no matter how challenged in abilities, no matter even how wicked. They would begin to understand that some sufferings do not have to be; that some sufferings ought not end in either dominance or death, but in change. They would have possibilities to discern whether and what actions they may and must take to make the world more just, and to make their countries, families, churches, sexual partnerships, and future occupations and professions more just. They would have ample opportunity to discover their own limitations, frailties, and powerlessness; but they would also learn of their own dignity.

These students would also have lives outside of their community of learning. They would, like students everywhere, have to engage in their own education in spite of economic constraints and pressures. They would have to make decisions in terms of their relationships with the ordinary political, social, ecclesiastical spheres of the wider world. They would bring all of their experiences to their learning—with no questions ruled out, no methods dismissed as not worth a try, no voices silenced because of their backgrounds.

And since this institution that I am imagining for my children and my friends would be Catholic and Mercy, it would foster an ethos, and have at least some participants, to witness to students that their freedom is ultimately a capacity to decide for or against what they believe is ultimate; that their capacity for relation stretches even to the infinite; that they may dare to hope in an unlimited future.

I have seen colleges and at least parts of universities where this kind of wisdom and justice is possible and even present. Yes, of course, there are serious obstacles and genuine limitations on what any form of higher education can provide. Not all students are ready to take advantage of the possibilities I describe. And despite their own preferences, there are many students who cannot take the time for a full college experience, who must therefore learn piecemeal and against great odds (though all the while meshing their learning with their everyday experience). Institutions, too, have fiscal limits, the kind of limits that threaten to turn decisions about faculty, programs, and equipment into sheer business matters. I have known colleges, universities, and students with all of these difficulties. No matter what, however, I would want to argue that no institution of higher education can be justified if its structures, its internal relationships, and its provisions for its students are unjust—which is to say, if they are unsuited to the pursuit of wisdom or respect for human dignity.

Mercy, like love, can be helpful or harmful, wise or foolish, inaccurate or true, creative or destructive. Mercy, like love, must therefore have standards, criteria, measures, whereby it is good or wise or true.

Mercy

Mercy both requires justice and makes it possible. How does it require justice? Mercy, like love (of which it is a form), can be helpful or harmful, wise or foolish, inaccurate or true, creative or destructive. Mercy, like love, must therefore have standards, criteria, measures, whereby it is good or wise or true. At the risk of being too brief and hence too blunt, let me simply say that the fundamental norm (measure, standard) for a right and good love, and a right and good mercy, is the concrete reality of the beloved.[6] If this is missed, mercy will miss its mark; it will harm rather than help. As examples: If I love and am "merciful" toward persons as if they are things, or things as if they are persons, I love them both unjustly. If I love and care for my stu-

If education leads anyone to judge persons from a false bias, to interpret situations naively, it will not lead to genuine mercy. This, then, is how mercy requires justice.

dents only as supporters of my reputation or fulfillers of my (or my institution's) ambitions, they will be right to say that I do not really love them but only myself. Or if I do in fact love them for themselves, but I am obtuse when it comes to understanding their genuine needs, I may injure them when I offer them what I have imagined they need or wanted them to need. If education leads anyone to judge persons from a false bias, to interpret situations naively, it will not lead to genuine mercy. This, then, is how mercy requires justice. Or better, the requirement for true mercy is, therefore, the wisdom to understand well—insofar as we can—concrete realities, contexts, relationships, and the claims they make on us in justice.

But mercy also makes justice possible. Mercy enhances the knowledge that is needed for justice, and it motivates actions that respond to the claims of justice. Mercy (or compassion) adds to love an element of stronger affective response and an assumption of more acute access to knowledge of the concrete reality of others. Love is a response to persons as lovable, as valuable; mercy is this same response with the added notion of "suffering with."[7] Precisely because mercy involves beholding the value of others and suffering with them in their need, it opens reality to the beholder; it offers a way of "seeing" that evokes a moral response—to alleviate pain, provide assistance in need, support in wellbeing. Mercy therefore illuminates justice and propels it to action.

To appeal to a Christian theological perspective: It is our belief that the mercy of God is intended to flow not only into and upon us but through us, one to the other. By God's grace, we are to understand one another's and the whole world's need for beauty as well as for bread, for companionship as well as for peace, for mutual respect and mutual strengthening of our loves, our justice, and our hopes. This is why we participate in higher education (whatever our role or position) as co-learners. Do we not grow in wisdom through the mutuality of our efforts—administrators, staff, students, faculty? Do we not gain clarity about the demands of justice through the challenges of one another? Is not this kind of receiving and giving a whole work of mercy whereby we at least try to advance human knowledge and wisdom, affirm freedom and dignity in a cherished universe, make choices about our loves, and strive to mend the world with justice?

Notes

1 See Christopher F. Mooney, *Boundaries Dimly Perceived: Law, Religion, Education, and the Common Good* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), part 3.

2 Michael Buckley, "The University and the Concern for Justice: The Search for a New Humanism," *Thought* 57 (June, 1982): 219–33.

3 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. Warner (New York: New American Library, 1963), 10.6.

4 I have treated these elements of human reality in a number of other writings, most recently in *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), chapter 6.

5 For a remarkable study of the long centuries in which Christians accepted slavery, see John T. Noonan, *A Church Which Can and Cannot Change* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). For the failure of church and society to recognize the equality of women and man, see Farley, *Just Love*, passim.

6 In the original version of this paper, I provided more extended examples of this. Here I only refer the reader to my *Compassionate Respect: A Feminist Approach to Medical Ethics and Other Questions* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), esp. 3–20. See also *Just Love*, 196–206.

7 See *Compassionate Respect*, 39–43, 72–79.

Parker J. Palmer

Author of *The Courage to Teach*

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF VOCATION

CHAPTER 1

Listening to Life

Some time when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life. Others
have come in their slow way into
my thought, and some have tried to help
or to hurt: ask me what difference
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there
are comings and goings from miles away
that hold the stillness exactly before us.
What the river says, that is what I say.

—William Stafford, "Ask Me"[1]

"Ask me whether what I have done is my life." For some, those words will be nonsense, nothing more than a poet's loose way

with language and logic. Of course what I have done is my life! To what am I supposed to compare it?

But for others, and I am one, the poet's words will be precise, piercing, and disquieting. They remind me of moments when it is clear—if I have eyes to see—that the life I am living is not the same as the life that wants to live in me. In those moments I sometimes catch a glimpse of my true life, a life hidden like the river beneath the ice. And in the spirit of the poet, I wonder: What am I meant to do? Who am I meant to be?

I was in my early thirties when I began, literally, to wake up to questions about my vocation. By all appearances, things were going well, but the soul does not put much stock in appearances. Seeking a path more purposeful than accumulating wealth, holding power, winning at competition, or securing a career, I had started to understand that it is indeed possible to live a life other than one's own. Fearful that I was doing just that—but uncertain about the deeper, truer life I sensed hidden inside me, uncertain whether it was real or trustworthy or within reach—I would snap awake in the middle of the night and stare for long hours at the ceiling.

Then I ran across the old Quaker saying, "Let your life speak." I found those words encouraging, and I thought I understood what they meant: "Let the highest truths and values guide you. Live up to those demanding standards in everything you do." Because I had heroes at the time who seemed to be doing exactly that, this exhortation had incarnate meaning for me—it meant living a life like that of Martin Luther King Jr. or Rosa Parks or Mahatma Gandhi or Dorothy Day, a life of high purpose.

So I lined up the loftiest ideals I could find and set out to achieve them. The results were rarely admirable, often laughable, and sometimes grotesque. But always they were unreal, a distortion of my true self—as must be the case when one lives from the outside in, not the inside out. I had simply found a "noble" way to live a life that was not my own, a life spent imitating heroes instead of listening to my heart.

Today, some thirty years later, "Let your life speak" means something else to me, a meaning faithful both to the ambiguity of those words and to the complexity of my own experience: "Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent."

My youthful understanding of "Let your life speak" led me to conjure up the highest values I could imagine and then try to conform my life to them whether they were mine or not. If that sounds like what we are *supposed* to do with values, it is because that is what we are too often taught. There is a simplistic brand of moralism among us that wants to reduce the ethical life to making a list, checking it twice—against the index in some best-selling book of virtues, perhaps—and then trying very hard to be not naughty but nice.

There may be moments in life when we are so unformed that we need to use values like an exoskeleton to keep us from collapsing. But something is very wrong if such moments recur often in adulthood. Trying to live someone else's life, or to live by an abstract norm, will invariably fail—and may even do great damage.

Vocation, the way I was seeking it, becomes an act of will, a grim determination that one's life will go this way or that whether it wants to or not. If the self is sin-ridden and will bow to truth and goodness only under duress, that approach to vocation makes sense. But if the self seeks not pathology but wholeness, as I believe it does, then the willful pursuit of vocation is an act of violence toward ourselves—violence in the name of a vision that, however lofty, is forced on the self from without rather than grown from within. True self, when violated, will always resist us, sometimes at great cost, holding our lives in check until we honor its truth.

Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening. I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about—quite apart from what I would like it to be about—or my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my intentions.

That insight is hidden in the word *vocation* itself, which is rooted in the Latin for "voice." Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at

the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I *must* live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.

Behind this understanding of vocation is a truth that the ego does not want to hear because it threatens the ego's turf: everyone has a life that is different from the "I" of daily consciousness, a life that is trying to live through the "I" who is its vessel. This is what the poet knows and what every wisdom tradition teaches: there is a great gulf between the way my ego wants to identify me, with its protective masks and self-serving fictions, and my true self.

It takes time and hard experience to sense the difference between the two—to sense that running beneath the surface of the experience I call my life, there is a deeper and truer life waiting to be acknowledged. That fact alone makes "listen to your life" difficult counsel to follow. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that from our first days in school, we are taught to listen to everything and everyone but ourselves, to take all our clues about living from the people and powers around us.

I sometimes lead retreats, and from time to time participants show me the notes they are taking as the retreat unfolds. The pattern is nearly universal: people take copious notes on what the retreat leader says, and they sometimes take notes on the words of certain wise people in the group, but rarely, if ever, do they take notes on what they themselves say. We listen for guidance everywhere except from within.

I urge retreatants to turn their note-taking around, because the words we speak often contain counsel we are trying to give ourselves. We have a strange conceit in our culture that simply because we have said something, we understand what it means! But often we do not—especially when we speak from a deeper place than intellect or ego, speak the kind of words that arise when the inner teacher feels safe enough to tell its truth. At those moments, we need to listen to what our lives are saying *and* take notes on it, lest we forget our own truth or deny that we ever heard it.

Verbalizing is not the only way our lives speak, of course. They speak through our actions and reactions, our intuitions and instincts, our feelings and bodily states of being, perhaps more profoundly than through our words. We are like plants, full of tropisms that draw us toward certain experiences and repel us from others. If we can learn to read our own responses to our own experience—a text we are writing unconsciously every day we spend on earth—we will receive the guidance we need to live more authentic lives.

But if I am to let my life speak things I want to hear, things I would gladly tell others, I must also let it speak things I do not want to hear and would never tell anyone else! My life is not only about my strengths and virtues; it is also about my liabilities and my limits, my trespasses and my shadow. An inevitable though often ignored dimension of the quest for "wholeness" is that we must embrace what we dislike or find shameful about ourselves as well as what we are confident and proud of. That is why the poet says, "ask me mistakes I have made."

In the chapters to come, I speak often of my own mistakes—of wrong turns I have taken, of misreadings of my own reality—for hidden in these moments are important clues to my own vocation. I do not feel despondent about my mistakes, any more than the poet does, though I grieve the pain they have sometimes caused others. Our lives are "experiments with truth" (to borrow the subtitle of Gandhi's autobiography), and in an experiment negative results are at least as important as successes.[2] I have no idea how I would have learned the truth about myself and my calling without the mistakes I have made, though by that measure I should have written a much longer book!

How we are to listen to our lives is a question worth exploring. In our culture, we tend to gather information in ways that do not work very well when the source is the human soul: the soul is not responsive to subpoenas or cross-examinations. At best it will stand in the dock only long enough to plead the Fifth Amendment. At worst it will jump bail and never be heard from again. The soul speaks its truth only under quiet, inviting, and trustworthy conditions.

The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient, and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an

hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.

That is why the poem at the head of this chapter ends in silence—and why I find it a bit embarrassing that as this chapter ends, I am drawing the reader not toward silence but toward speech, page after page of speech! I hope that my speech is faithful to what I have heard, in the silence, from my soul. And I hope that the reader who sits with this book can hear the silence that always surrounds us in the writing and reading of words. It is a silence that forever invites us to fathom the meaning of our lives—and forever reminds us of depths of meaning that words will never touch.

CHAPTER II

Now I Become Myself

A VISION OF VOCATION

With twenty-one words, carefully chosen and artfully woven, May Sarton evokes the quest for vocation—at least, my quest for vocation—with candor and precision:

> Now I become myself.
> It's taken time, many years and places.
> I have been dissolved and shaken,
> Worn other people's faces. . . .[1]

What a long time it can take to become the person one has always been! How often in the process we mask ourselves in faces that are not our own. How much dissolving and shaking of ego we must endure before we discover our deep identity—the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation.

I first learned about vocation growing up in the church. I value much about the religious tradition in which I was raised: its humility about its own convictions, its respect for the world's diversity, its concern for justice. But the idea of "vocation" I picked up in those circles created distortion until I grew strong enough to discard it. I mean the idea that vocation, or calling, comes from a voice external to ourselves, a voice of moral demand that asks us to become someone we are not yet—someone different, someone better, someone just beyond our reach.

That concept of vocation is rooted in a deep distrust of selfhood, in the belief that the sinful self will always be "selfish" unless corrected by external forces of virtue. It is a notion that made me feel inadequate to the task of living my own life, creating guilt about the distance between who I was and who I was supposed to be, leaving me exhausted as I labored to close the gap.

Today I understand vocation quite differently—not as a goal to be achieved but as a gift to be received. Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice "out there" calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice "in here" calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.

It is a strange gift, this birthright gift of self. Accepting it turns out to be even more demanding than attempting to

become someone else! I have sometimes responded to that demand by ignoring the gift, or hiding it, or fleeing from it, or squandering it—and I think I am not alone. There is a Hasidic tale that reveals, with amazing brevity, both the universal tendency to want to be someone else and the ultimate importance of becoming one's self: Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?' "[2]

If you doubt that we all arrive in this world with gifts and as a gift, pay attention to an infant or a very young child. A few years ago, my daughter and her newborn baby came to live with me for a while. Watching my granddaughter from her earliest days on earth, I was able, in my early fifties, to see something that had eluded me as a twenty-something parent: my granddaughter arrived in the world as *this* kind of person rather than *that*, or *that*, or *that*.

She did not show up as raw material to be shaped into whatever image the world might want her to take. She arrived with her own gifted form, with the shape of her own sacred soul. Biblical faith calls it the image of God in which we are all created. Thomas Merton calls it true self. Quakers call it the inner light, or "that of God" in every person. The humanist tradition calls it identity and integrity. No matter what you call it, it is a pearl of great price.

In those early days of my granddaughter's life, I began observing the inclinations and proclivities that were planted in

her at birth. I noticed, and I still notice, what she likes and dislikes, what she is drawn toward and repelled by, how she moves, what she does, what she says.

I am gathering my observations in a letter. When my granddaughter reaches her late teens or early twenties, I will make sure that my letter finds its way to her, with a preface something like this: "Here is a sketch of who you were from your earliest days in this world. It is not a definitive picture—only you can draw that. But it was sketched by a person who loves you very much. Perhaps these notes will help you do sooner something your grandfather did only later: remember who you were when you first arrived and reclaim the gift of true self."

We arrive in this world with birthright gifts—then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them. As young people, we are surrounded by expectations that may have little to do with who we really are, expectations held by people who are not trying to discern our selfhood but to fit us into slots. In families, schools, workplaces, and religious communities, we are trained away from true self toward images of acceptability; under social pressures like racism and sexism our original shape is deformed beyond recognition; and we ourselves, driven by fear, too often betray true self to gain the approval of others.

We are disabused of original giftedness in the first half of our lives. Then—if we are awake, aware, and able to admit our loss—we spend the second half trying to recover and reclaim the gift we once possessed.

When we lose track of true self, how can we pick up the trail? One way is to seek clues in stories from our younger years, years when we lived closer to our birthright gifts. A few years ago, I found some clues to myself in a time machine of sorts. A friend sent me a tattered copy of my high school newspaper from May 1957 in which I had been interviewed about what I intended to do with my life. With the certainty to be expected of a high school senior, I told the interviewer that I would become a naval aviator and then take up a career in advertising.

I was indeed "wearing other people's faces," and I can tell you exactly whose they were. My father worked with a man who had once been a navy pilot. He was Irish, charismatic, romantic, full of the wild blue yonder and a fair share of the blarney, and I wanted to be like him. The father of one of my boyhood friends was in advertising, and though I did not yearn to take on his persona, which was too buttoned-down for my taste, I did yearn for the fast car and other large toys that seemed to be the accessories of his selfhood!

These self-prophecies, now over forty years old, seem wildly misguided for a person who eventually became a Quaker, a would-be pacifist, a writer, and an activist. Taken literally, they illustrate how early in life we can lose track of who we are. But inspected through the lens of paradox, my desire to become an aviator and an advertiser contain clues to the core of true self that would take many years to emerge: clues, by definition, are coded and must be deciphered.

Hidden in my desire to become an "ad man" was a lifelong fascination with language and its power to persuade, the same fascination that has kept me writing incessantly for decades. Hidden in my desire to become a naval aviator was something more complex: a personal engagement with the problem of violence that expressed itself at first in military fantasies and then, over a period of many years, resolved itself in the pacifism I aspire to today. When I flip the coin of identity I held to so tightly in high school, I find the paradoxical "opposite" that emerged as the years went by.

If I go farther back, to an earlier stage of my life, the clues need less deciphering to yield insight into my birthright gifts and callings. In grade school, I became fascinated with the mysteries of flight. As many boys did in those days, I spent endless hours, after school and on weekends, designing, crafting, flying, and (usually) crashing model airplanes made of fragile balsa wood.

Unlike most boys, however, I also spent long hours creating eight- and twelve-page books about aviation. I would turn a sheet of paper sideways; draw a vertical line down the middle; make diagrams of, say, the cross-section of a wing; roll the sheet into a typewriter; and peck out a caption explaining how air moving across an airfoil creates a vacuum that lifts the plane. Then I would fold that sheet in half along with several others I had made, staple the collection together down the spine, and painstakingly illustrate the cover.

I had always thought that the meaning of this paperwork was obvious: fascinated with flight, I wanted to be a pilot, or at least an aeronautical engineer. But recently, when I found a couple of these literary artifacts in an old cardboard box, I suddenly saw the truth, and it was more obvious than I had imagined. I didn't want to be a pilot or an aeronautical engineer or anything else related to aviation. I wanted to be an author, to make books—a task I have been attempting from the third grade to this very moment!

From the beginning, our lives lay down clues to selfhood and vocation, though the clues may be hard to decode. But trying to interpret them is profoundly worthwhile—especially when we are in our twenties or thirties or forties, feeling profoundly lost, having wandered, or been dragged, far away from our birthright gifts.

Those clues are helpful in counteracting the conventional concept of vocation, which insists that our lives must be driven by "oughts." As noble as that may sound, we do not find our callings by conforming ourselves to some abstract moral code. We find our callings by claiming authentic selfhood, by being who we are, by dwelling in the world as Zusya rather than straining to be Moses. The deepest vocational question is not "What ought I to do with my life?" It is the more elemental and demanding "Who am I? What is my nature?"

Everything in the universe has a nature, which means limits as well as potentials, a truth well known by people who

work daily with the things of the world. Making pottery, for example, involves more than telling the clay what to become. The clay presses back on the potter's hands, telling her what it can and cannot do—and if she fails to listen, the outcome will be both frail and ungainly. Engineering involves more than telling materials what they must do. If the engineer does not honor the nature of the steel or the wood or the stone, his failure will go well beyond aesthetics: the bridge or the building will collapse and put human life in peril.

The human self also has a nature, limits as well as potentials. If you seek vocation without understanding the material you are working with, what you build with your life will be ungainly and may well put lives in peril, your own and some of those around you. "Faking it" in the service of high values is no virtue and has nothing to do with vocation. It is an ignorant, sometimes arrogant, attempt to override one's nature, and it will always fail.

Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we *ought* to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."[3]

Buechner's definition starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world: it begins, wisely, where vocation begins—not in what the world needs (which is everything), but in the nature of the human self, in what brings the self joy, the deep joy of knowing that we are here on earth to be the gifts that God created.

Contrary to the conventions of our thinly moralistic culture, this emphasis on gladness and selfhood is not selfish. The Quaker teacher Douglas Steere was fond of saying that the ancient human question "Who am I?" leads inevitably to the equally important question "Whose am I?"—for there is no selfhood outside of relationship. We must ask the question of selfhood and answer it as honestly as we can, no matter where it takes us. Only as we do so can we discover the community of our lives.

As I learn more about the seed of true self that was planted when I was born, I also learn more about the ecosystem in which I was planted—the network of communal relations in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know both seed and system, self and community, can I embody the great commandment to love both my neighbor and myself.

JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS

Most of us arrive at a sense of self and vocation only after a long journey through alien lands. But this journey bears no resemblance to the trouble-free "travel packages" sold by the

tourism industry. It is more akin to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage—"a transformative journey to a sacred center" full of hardships, darkness, and peril.[4]

In the tradition of pilgrimage, those hardships are seen not as accidental but as integral to the journey itself. Treacherous terrain, bad weather, taking a fall, getting lost—challenges of that sort, largely beyond our control, can strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge and make space for true self to emerge. If that happens, the pilgrim has a better chance to find the sacred center he or she seeks. Disabused of our illusions by much travel and travail, we awaken one day to find that the sacred center is here and now—in every moment of the journey, everywhere in the world around us, and deep within our own hearts.

But before we come to that center, full of light, we must travel in the dark. Darkness is not the whole of the story—every pilgrimage has passages of loveliness and joy—but it is the part of the story most often left untold. When we finally escape the darkness and stumble into the light, it is tempting to tell others that our hope never flagged, to deny those long nights we spent cowering in fear.

The experience of darkness has been essential to my coming into selfhood, and telling the truth about that fact helps me stay in the light. But I want to tell that truth for another reason as well: many young people today journey in the dark, as the young always have, and we elders do them a disservice when we withhold the shadowy parts of our lives. When I was

young, there were very few elders willing to talk about the darkness; most of them pretended that success was all they had ever known. As the darkness began to descend on me in my early twenties, I thought I had developed a unique and terminal case of failure. I did not realize that I had merely embarked on a journey toward joining the human race.

The story of my journey is no more or less important than anyone else's. It is simply the best source of data I have on a subject where generalizations often fail but truth may be found in the details. I want to rehearse a few details of my travels, and travails, extracting some insights about vocation as I go. I do so partly as an offering of honesty to the young and partly as a reminder to anyone who needs it that the nuances of personal experience contain much guidance toward selfhood and vocation.

My journey into darkness began in sunlit places. I grew up in a Chicago suburb and went to Carleton College in Minnesota, a splendid place where I found new faces to wear—faces more like my own than the ones I donned in high school, but still the faces of other people. Wearing one of them, I went from college neither to the navy nor to Madison Avenue but to Union Theological Seminary in New York City, as certain that the ministry was now my calling as I had been a few years earlier about advertising and aviation.

So it came as a great shock when, at the end of my first year, God spoke to me—in the form of mediocre grades and massive misery—and informed me that under no conditions

was I to become an ordained leader in His or Her church. Always responsive to authority, as one was if raised in the fifties, I left Union and went west, to the University of California at Berkeley. There I spent much of the sixties working on a Ph.D. in sociology and learning to be not quite so responsive to authority.

Berkeley in the sixties was, of course, an astounding mix of shadow and light. But contrary to the current myth, many of us were less seduced by the shadow than drawn by the light, coming away from that time and place with a lifelong sense of hope, a feeling for community, a passion for social change.

Though I taught for two years in the middle of graduate school, discovering that I loved teaching and was good at it, my Berkeley experience left me convinced that a university career would be a cop-out. I felt called instead to work on "the urban crisis." So when I left Berkeley in the late sixties—a friend kept asking me, "Why do you want to go back to America?"—I also left academic life. Indeed, I left on a white horse (some might say a high horse), full of righteous indignation about the academy's corruption, holding aloft the flaming sword of truth. I moved to Washington, D.C., where I became not a professor but a community organizer.

What I learned about the world from that work was the subject of an earlier book.[5] What I learned about vocation is how one's values can do battle with one's heart. I felt morally compelled to work on the urban crisis, but doing so

went against a growing sense that teaching might be my vocation. My heart wanted to keep teaching, but my ethics—fueled liberally with ego—told me I was supposed to save the cv. How could I reconcile the contradiction between the two?

After two years of community organizing, with all its financial uncertainties, Georgetown University offered me a faculty post—one that did not require me to get off my white hoe altogether: "We don't want you to be on campus all week long," said the dean. "We want you to get our students involved in the community. Here's a tenure-track position involving a minimum of classes and no requirement to serve on committees. Keep working in the community and take our students out there with you."

The part about no committees seemed like a gift from God, so I accepted Georgetown's offer and began involving undergraduates in community organizing. But I soon found an even bigger gift hidden in this arrangement. By looking anew at my community work through the lens of education I saw that as an organizer I had never stopped being a teacher—I was simply teaching in a classroom without walls.

In fact, I could have done no other: teaching, I was coming to understand, is my native way of being in the world. Make me a cleric or a CEO, a poet or a politico, and teaching is what I will do. Teaching is at the heart of my vocation and will manifest itself in any role I play. Georgetown's invitation allowed me to take my first step toward embracing this truth, toward a lifelong exploration of "education unplugged."

But even this way of reframing my work could not alter the fact that there was a fundamental misfit between the rough-and-tumble of organizing and my own overly sensitive nature. After five years of conflict and competition, I burned out. I was too thin-skinned to make a good community organizer—my vocational reach had exceeded my grasp. I had been driven more by the "oughts" of the urban crisis than by a sense of true self. Lacking insight into my own limits and potentials, I had allowed ego and ethics to lead me into a situation that my soul could not abide.

I was disappointed in myself for not being tough enough to take the flak, disappointed and ashamed. But as pilgrims must discover if they are to complete their quest, we are led to truth by our weaknesses as well as our strengths. I needed to leave community organizing for a reason I might never have acknowledged had I not been thin-skinned and burned-out: as an organizer, I was trying to take people to a place where I had never been myself—a place called community. If I wanted to do community-related work with integrity, I needed a deeper immersion in community than I had experienced to that point.

I am white, middle-class, and male—not exactly a leading candidate for a communal life. People like me are raised to live autonomously, not interdependently. I had been trained to compete and win, and I had developed a taste for the prizes. But something in me yearned to experience communion, not competition, and that something might never have made itself known had burnout not forced me to seek another way.

So I took a yearlong sabbatical from my work in Washington and went to a place called Pendle Hill outside of Philadelphia. Founded in 1930, Pendle Hill is a Quaker living-and-learning community of some seventy people whose mission is to offer education about the inner journey, nonviolent social change, and the connection between the two. It is a real-time experiment in Quaker faith and practice where residents move through a daily round of communal life: worshiping in silence each morning; sharing three meals a day; engaging in study, physical work, decision making, and social outreach. It is a commune, an ashram, a monastery, a zendo, a kibbutz—whatever one calls it, Pendle Hill was a life unlike anything I had ever known.[6]

Moving there was like moving to Mars—utterly alien but profoundly compelling. I thought I would stay for just a year and then go back to Washington and resume my work. But before my sabbatical ended, I was invited to become Pendle Hill's dean of studies. I stayed on for another decade, living in community and continuing my experiment with alternative models of education.

It was a transformative passage for me, personally, professionally, and spiritually; in retrospect, I know how impoverished I would have been without it. But early on in that passage I began to have deep and painful doubts about the trajectory of my vocation. Though I felt called to stay at Pendle Hill, I also feared that I had stepped off the edge of the known world and was at risk of disappearing professionally.

From high school on, I had been surrounded by expectations that I would ascend to some sort of major leadership. When I was twenty-nine, the president of a prestigious college visited me in Berkeley to recruit me for his board of trustees. He was doing it, he joked, because no one on that board was under sixty, let alone thirty; worse still, not one of them had a beard, which I could supply as part of the Berkeley uniform. Then he added, "In fact, I'm doing this because some day you'll be a college president—of that I'm sure—and serving as a trustee is an important part of your apprenticeship." I accepted his invitation because I felt certain that he was right.

So half a dozen years later, what was I doing at Pendle Hill, a "commune" known to few, run by an offbeat religious community that most people can identify only by their oatmeal—which, I hasten to add, is not really made by Quakers?

I'll tell you what I was doing: I was in the craft shop making mugs that weighed more and looked worse than the clay ashtrays I made in grade school, and I was sending these monstrosities home as gifts to my family. My father, rest his soul, was in the fine chinaware business, and I was sending him mugs so heavy you could fill them with coffee and not feel any difference in weight!

Family and friends were asking me—and I was asking myself—"Why did you get a Ph.D. if this is what you are going to do? Aren't you squandering your opportunities and gifts?" Under that sort of scrutiny, my vocational decision felt wasteful and ridiculous; what's more, it was terrifying to an ego

like mine that had no desire to disappear and every desire to succeed and become well known.

Did I *want* to go to Pendle Hill, to be at Pendle Hill, to stay at Pendle Hill? I cannot say that I did. But I can say with certainty that Pendle Hill was something that I *couldn't not do.*

Vocation at its deepest level is not, "Oh, boy, do I want to go to this strange place where I have to learn a new way to live and where no one, including me, understands what I'm doing." Vocation at its deepest level is, "This is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling."

And yet, even with this level of motivation, my doubts multiplied. One day I walked from Pendle Hill through the woods to a nearby college campus, out for a simple stroll but carrying my anxiety with me. On some forgotten whim, I went into the college's main administration building. There, in the foyer, hung several stern portraits of past presidents of that institution. One of them was the same man who, as president of another institution, had come out to Berkeley to recruit me for his board of trustees—a man who, in my imagination, was now staring down at me with a deeply disapproving look on his face: "What do you think you're up to? Why are you wasting your time? Get back on track before it is too late!"

I ran from that building back into the woods and wept for a long time. Perhaps this moment precipitated the descent into darkness that has been so central to my vocational

journey, a descent that hit bottom in the struggle with clinical depression that I will write about later in this book. But whether that is the case or not, the moment was large with things I needed to learn—and could learn only by going into the dark.

In that moment, all the false bravado about why I had left academic life collapsed around me, and I was left with nothing more than the reality of my own fear. I had insisted, to myself as well as others, that I wanted out of the university because it was unfit for human habitation. It was, I argued, a place of corruption and arrogance, filled with intellectuals who evaded their social responsibilities and yet claimed superiority over ordinary folks—the very folks whose lack of power and privilege compelled them to shoulder the responsibilities that kept our society intact.

If those complaints sound unoriginal, it is only because they are. They were the accepted pieties of Berkeley in the sixties, which—for reasons I now understand—I eagerly embraced as my own. Whatever half-truths about the university my complaints may have contained, they served me primarily as a misleading and self-serving explanation of why I fled academic life.

The truth is that I fled because I was afraid—afraid that I could never succeed as a scholar, afraid that I could never measure up to the university's standards for research and publication. And I was right—though it took many years before I

could admit that to myself. Try as I may, try as I might, I have never had the gifts that make for a good scholar—and remaining in the university would have been a distorting denial of that fact.

A scholar is committed to building on knowledge that others have gathered, correcting it, confirming it, enlarging it. But I have always wanted to think my own thoughts about a subject without being overly influenced by what others have thought before me. If you catch me reading a book in private, it is most likely to be a novel, some poetry, a mystery, or an essay that defies classification, rather than a text directly related to whatever I am writing at the time.

There is some virtue in my proclivities, I think: they help me keep my thinking fresh and bring me the stimulation that comes from looking at life through multiple lenses. There is non-virtue in them as well: laziness of a sort, a certain kind of impatience, and perhaps even a lack of due respect for others who have worked these fields.

But be they virtues or faults, these are the simple facts about my nature, about my limits and my gifts. I am less gifted at building on other people's discoveries than at tinkering in my own garage; less gifted at slipping slowly into a subject than at jumping into the deep end to see if I can swim; less gifted at making outlines than at writing myself into a corner and trying to find a way out; less gifted at tracking a tight chain of logic than at leaping from one metaphor to the next!

rhaps there is a lesson here about the complexity, even
ty, we must embrace on the road to vocation, where we
mes find ourselves needing to do the right thing for
ong reason. It was right for me to leave the university.
eeded to do it for the wrong reason—"the university
upt"—because the right reason—"I lack the gifts of a
r"—was too frightening for me to face at the time.
ly fear of failing as a scholar contained the energy I
d to catapult myself out of the academy and free myself
other kind of educational mission. But because I could
knowledge my fear, I had to disguise that energy as the
horse of judgment and self-righteousness. It is an awk-
fact, but it is true—and once I could acknowledge that
and understand its role in the dynamics of my life, I
l myself no longer embarrassed by it.
Eventually, I was able to get off that white horse and take
blinking look at myself and my liabilities. This was a step
darkness that I had been trying to avoid—the darkness of
g myself more honestly than I really wanted to. But I am
ful for the grace that allowed me to dismount, for the
e horse I was riding back then could never have carried
o the place where I am today: serving, with love, the acad-
I once left in fear and loathing.
Today I serve education from outside the institution—
re my pathology is less likely to get triggered—rather than
the inside, where I waste energy on anger instead of

investing it in hope. This pathology, which took me years to recognize, is my tendency to get so conflicted with the way people use power in institutions that I spend more time being angry at them than I spend on my real work.

Once I understood that the problem was "in here" as well as "out there," the solution seemed clear: I needed to work independently, outside of institutions, detached from the stimuli that trigger my knee-jerk response. Having done just that for over a decade now, my pathology no longer troubles me: I have no one to blame but myself for whatever the trouble may be and am compelled to devote my energies to the work I am called to do!

Here, I think, is another clue to finding true self and vocation: we must withdraw the negative projections we make on people and situations—projections that serve mainly to mask our fears about ourselves—and acknowledge and embrace our own liabilities and limits.

Once I came to terms with my fears, I was able to look back and trace an unconscious pattern. For years, I had been moving away from large institutions like Berkeley and Georgetown to small places like Pendle Hill, places of less status and visibility on the map of social reality. But I moved like a crab, always too fearful to look head-on at the fact that I was taking myself from the center to the fringes of institutional life—and ultimately to a place where all that was left was to move outside of institutions altogether.

I rationalized my movement with the notion that small institutions are more moral than large ones. But that is patently untrue—both about what was animating me and about institutions! In fact, I was animated by a soul, a "true self," that knew me better than my ego did, knew that I needed to work outside of institutional crosscurrents and constraints.

This is not an indictment of institutions; it is a statement of my limitations. Among my admired friends are people who do not have my limits, whose gifts allow them to work faithfully within institutions and, through those institutions, to serve the world well. But their gift is not mine, as I learned after much *Sturm und Drang*—and that is not an indictment of me. It is simply a truth about who I am and how I am rightfully related to the world, an ecological truth of the sort that can point toward true vocation.

SELFHOOD, SOCIETY, AND SERVICE

By surviving passages of doubt and depression on the vocational journey, I have become clear about at least one thing: self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch.

There are at least two ways to understand the link between selfhood and service. One is offered by the poet Rumi in his piercing observation: "If you are here unfaithfully with us, you're causing terrible damage."[7] If we are unfaithful to true self, we will extract a price from others. We will make promises we cannot keep, build houses from flimsy stuff, conjure dreams that devolve into nightmares, and other people will suffer—if we are unfaithful to true self.

I will examine that sort of unfaithfulness, and its consequences, later in this book. But a more inspiring way of understanding the link between selfhood and service is to study the lives of people who have been here *faithfully* with us. Look, for example, at the great liberation movements that have served humanity so well—in eastern Europe, Latin America, and South Africa, among women, African Americans, and our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. What we see is simple but often ignored: the movements that transform us, our relations, and our world emerge from the lives of people who decide to care for their authentic selfhood.

The social systems in which these people must survive often try to force them to live in a way untrue to who they are. If you are poor, you are supposed to accept, with gratitude, half a loaf or less; if you are black, you are supposed to suffer racism without protest; if you are gay, you are supposed to

pretend that you are not. You and I may not know, but we can at least imagine, how tempting it would be to mask one's truth in situations of this sort—because the system threatens punishment if one does not.

But in spite of that threat, or because of it, the people who plant the seeds of movements make a critical decision: they decide to live "divided no more." *They decide no longer to act on the outside in a way that contradicts some truth about themselves that they hold deeply on the inside.* They decide to claim authentic selfhood and act it out—and their decisions ripple out to transform the society in which they live, serving the selfhood of millions of others.

I call this the "Rosa Parks decision" because that remarkable woman is so emblematic of what the undivided life can mean. Most of us know her story, the story of an African American woman who, at the time she made her decision, was a seamstress in her early forties. On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks did something she was not supposed to do: she sat down at the front of a bus in one of the seats reserved for whites—a dangerous, daring, and provocative act in a racist society.

Legend has it that years later a graduate student came to Rosa Parks and asked, "Why did you sit down at the front of the bus that day?" Rosa Parks did not say that she sat down to launch a movement, because her motives were more elemental than that. She said, "I sat down because I was tired." But she did not mean that her feet were tired. She meant that her soul

was tired, her heart was tired, her whole being was tired of playing by racist rules, of denying her soul's claim to selfhood.[5]

Of course, there were many forces aiding and abetting Rosa Parks's decision to live divided no more. She had studied the theory and tactics of nonviolence at the Highlander Folk School, where Martin Luther King Jr. was also a student. She was secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, whose members had been discussing civil disobedience.

But in the moment she sat down at the front of the bus on that December day, she had no guarantee that the theory of nonviolence would work or that her community would back her up. It was a moment of existential truth, of claiming authentic selfhood, of reclaiming birthright giftedness—and in that moment she set in motion a process that changed both the lay and the law of the land.

Rosa Parks sat down because she had reached a point where it was essential to embrace her true vocation—not as someone who would reshape our society but as someone who would live out her full self in the world. She decided, "I will no longer act on the outside in a way that contradicts the truth that I hold deeply on the inside. I will no longer act as if I were less than the whole person I know myself inwardly to be."

Where does one get the courage to "sit down at the front of the bus" in a society that punishes anyone who decides to live divided no more? After all, conventional wisdom recommends the divided life as the safe and sane way to go: "Don't

wear your heart on your sleeve." "Don't make a federal case out of it." "Don't show them the whites of your eyes." These are all the clichéd ways we tell each other to keep personal truth apart from public life, lest we make ourselves vulnerable in that rough-and-tumble realm.

Where do people find the courage to live divided no more when they know they will be punished for it? The answer I have seen in the lives of people like Rosa Parks is simple: these people have transformed the notion of punishment itself. They have come to understand that *no punishment anyone might inflict on them could possibly be worse than the punishment they inflict on themselves by conspiring in their own diminishment.*

In the Rosa Parks story, that insight emerges in a wonderful way. After she had sat at the front of the bus for a while, the police came aboard and said, "You know, if you continue to sit there, we're going to have to throw you in jail."

Rosa Parks replied, "You may do that . . .," which is a very polite way of saying, "What could your jail of stone and steel possibly mean to me, compared to the self-imposed imprisonment I've suffered for forty years—the prison I've just walked out of by refusing to conspire any longer with this racist system?"

The punishment imposed on us for claiming true self can never be worse than the punishment we impose on ourselves by failing to make that claim. And the converse is true as well: no reward anyone might give us could possibly be greater than the reward that comes from living by our own best lights.

You and I may not have Rosa Parks's particular battle to fight, the battle with institutional racism. The universal element in her story is not the substance of her fight but the selfhood in which she stood while she fought it—for each of us holds the challenge and the promise of naming and claiming true self.

But if the Rosa Parks story is to help us discern our own vocations, we must see her as the ordinary person she is. That will be difficult to do because we have made her into superwoman—and we have done it to protect ourselves. If we can keep Rosa Parks in a museum as an untouchable icon of truth, we will remain untouchable as well: we can put her up on a pedestal and praise her, world without end, never finding ourselves challenged by her life.

Since my own life runs no risk of being displayed in a museum case, I want to return briefly to the story I know best—my own. Unlike Rosa Parks, I never took a singular, dramatic action that might create the energy of transformation around the institutions I care about. Instead, I tried to abandon those institutions through an evasive, crablike movement that I did not want to acknowledge, even to myself.

But a funny thing happened on the way to my vocation. Today, twenty-five years after I left education in anger and fear, my work is deeply related to the renewal of educational institutions. I believe that this is possible only because my true self dragged me, kicking and screaming, toward honoring its nature and needs, forcing me to find my rightful place in the

ecosystem of life, to find a right relation to institutions with which I have a lifelong lover's quarrel. Had I denied my true self, remaining "at my post" simply because I was paralyzed with fear, I would almost certainly be lost in bitterness today instead of serving a cause I care about.

Rosa Parks took her stand with clarity and courage. I took mine by diversion and default. Some journeys are direct, and some are circuitous; some are heroic, and some are fearful and muddled. But every journey, honestly undertaken, stands a chance of taking us toward the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need.

As May Sarton reminds us, the pilgrimage toward true self will take "time, many years and places." The world needs people with the patience and the passion to make that pilgrimage not only for their own sake but also as a social and political act. The world still waits for the truth that will set us free—my truth, your truth, our truth—the truth that was seeded in the earth when each of us arrived here formed in the image of God. Cultivating that truth, I believe, is the authentic vocation of every human being.