Evangelization and The New World

Mercy Reflections on the Fifth Centenary
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Margaret A. Farley, RSM
Dear Readers,

1992 marks the fifth centenary of the landing of Columbus and other Europeans in what came to be called the Americas. This remembrance offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on how our enculturation might influence misunderstandings of Christianity and the actions or attitudes we associate with being Christian or being merciful. In addition to the horse, disease, and sugar, the Europeans brought Christianity to these continents and islands. And unfortunately, because of the way Christianity was widely understood and lived, the Europeans destroyed many peoples and cultures with the sanction of Christianity. While in the Dominican Republic recently, I attended a Palm Sunday service during which the people waved their palm branches and, in almost pep rally fashion, shouted "Christos ayer, Christos hoy, Christos siempre" ("Christ yesterday, Christ today, Christ forever"). I could not help but shudder at the potential violence that such fervor could unleash.

And yet, encouraging one another to discover and be faithful to that which promises a fuller humanness among us is essential in our world. Christianity is one religious expression offering fullness of life not only to individuals but also to our world, and evangelization seems especially crucial in the light of the many agonies we experience. However, the what of Christianity and the how it is preached must be carefully considered. The articles in this issue edited by Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt (Burlingame) include reflection on issues related to the quincentenary remembrance.

With this issue we begin the occasional publication of addresses or presentations that even though delivered to a smaller group among us seem to have relevance for the life of our Institute. Margaret A. Farley's (Detroit) presentation at the opening of the Baltimore regional community chapter in January, 1992 contains reflections to aid us in living into the reality of our direction statement.

Peace,

Maryanne Stevens, RSM
Mercy Reflections on the Fifth Centenary
Deborah Watson, R.S.M.

Several months ago my friend, Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, wrote to me giving the "opportunity" to write an article for MAST on the Quincentenary commemoration of the "discovery" of America. I hesitated, suspecting that I was asked to write an article for a world of academia from which I had long since divorced myself and knowing that my kerosene lamp, toy-like typewriter and lack of access to an organized library (not to mention word-processors, microfiche, etc.) would make the task very difficult. Besides, I felt I would have little to add to the reams of printed material celebrating, commemorating and propping the significance of the arrival of Columbus and the subsequent evangelization of Asia, Australia and America. I had been away for so long from this academic world that I decided not to respond.

But later I had the grace of experiencing traveling, mostly by land, from Puno (where I live and work among the Ayamara people of the Peruvian Altiplano) through La Paz, Bolivia; Asuncion, Paraguay; Iguazu Falls, Brazil-Argentina; San Ignacio, Buenos Aires; Northern Patagonia and Jujuy in Argentina; Potosi, Bolivia and back to Puno. The process of conquering and colonizing the Americas involved the largest genocide and ethnoicide ever recorded.

Inspired by this journey through a myriad of cultural worlds, by the symbolic force of the Iguazu Falls, and by the warm hospitality of the Argentinian Mercies, with whom I spent a month, I decided "yes," I might have something to share that would be one Sister of Mercy's very personal reflection on how this commemoration might challenge and move us as daughters of Catalina McAuley.

As a backdrop for these reflections, it seems important to make several clarifications. In the first place, the term "genocide" is being used in its broadest sense to include all human destruction; in the second place, the term "ethnoicide" includes all cultural destruction; in the third place, the term "hieratic" includes all the effects of conquest and domination.

Within ... Mercy communities, the anger of centuries must be allowed to surface, to be experienced and expressed so that new energy may be made available for a new evangelization.

And contemplating this I ask how do we as Sisters of Mercy fit into this new creation? Having traveled through the primarily indigenous culture of the Andean Altiplano, through the fascinating blend that is Potosi with its colonial silver mines, and through the complex of cultural influences in the new Andean town of Potosi one remembers the thousands of Guarani people rounded up as silver miners; and to this day the site is considered a bad-luck place.

Not only the memory lives on; so does the reality of colonization and exploitation by the Western First World. Speaking of Latin America, current literature identifies three stages of conquest: the initial invasion by the Spanish and Portuguese, the economic "expansion" by the Europeans, and the largely U.S. dominated period of the last half of this century. Two examples of the latter would be the policies of the IMF as they are forced on Latin American countries; and the fact that 75% of Peruvian minerals are controlled by foreign multinational corporations.

Hence, any responsible treatment of the Fifth Centenary must acknowledge the various ways that cultural and spiritual politics were involved by the voyages of Columbus are being named: discovery of America, encounter between two worlds, genocide, destruction of civilizations, invasion, conquest of the Americas. Columbus' destruction of native populations, discovery of the new world, first evangelization, etc. Obviously, each of these "naming flows" out of a perspective on the original events and results in the desire to commemorate 1492 in a particular way. Therefore we encounter references to celebration, to call to repentance, to begin a new evangelization, celebration of resistance, rendering of accounts, etc. The complexity of these perspectives cannot be developed here, but they do provide a context for my reflections and hint at an answer to the question: how do we as Sisters of Mercy ministering in Latin America respond to the prophetic call inherent in this endeavor?
Committed as we are to Catherine's undisputed option, we must plunge in with all the risks and asceticism that this involves.

Any effort to work with the poor will lead us to a spirituality of the cross. Most of us have heard the words of Catherine's Original Rule: "Ours is a Congregation founded on Calvary to serve a crucified Redeemer." And the crucified Redeemer, the Suffering Servant, is one with the crucified people. Jon Sobrino introduces his article, "The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today," in this way: Ignacio Ellacuria admired Jürgen Moltmann's well-known book The Crucified God, but he made a point of stressing another much more urgent theological idea: the crucified people. This was not just for historical reasons (our reality is like this), but also for theological ones (God's creation is like this). It is necessary for us to speak of these crucified peoples in relation to 1992, as well, in order to recall their historical causes. And the sole object of all this talk must be to bring them down from the cross...

This theology of the crucified peoples has become established in Latin America, whereas in other places it may seem exaggerated, unjustified or unscientifc, in our language.

As Janet Ruffing has pointed out so well, Catherine's nineteenth century devotion to the Cross "grew out of helplessness in the face of overwhelming suffering from illness, the omnipresence of death, the dehumanization of the very poor, and grindingly unjust social conditions." And all of this describes Latin America today. At this moment in history, a moment of repentance has been and of commitment to a more just future, which, and within which to do this.

One another as we embrace our multi-cultural and international reality. One of the distinct challenges of the next years will be the creation of structures that will strengthen our identity as Mercies and enable us to better express Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor. The Latin American and Caribbean Conference (meeting in Jamaica in July of 1992) is one expression of this desire for greater solidarity among us. And the South American section (which meets in Santiago de Chile in February of 1993) will be considering the possibility of a joint foundation in one of the countries of South America where "Mercy" is now present. This would be seen not only as a gesture in commemoration of the Quincentenary, but also as a positive contribution toward greater separation of national identities, creating a wider space for mutual cooperation, and forming the personal bonds that must be the foundation of any such unity. In this context it might be well to recall that the miracle of the first Pentecost was not that the new Christians all spoke the same language, but that speaking in their own language they understood one another. (Acts 2:6).

The challenge formulated by the Institute General Chapter as a call to conversion in our life-styles and ministries harmonizes profoundly with the Latin American reflection on religious life that has as its starting point the option for the poor, the desire of liberal theology to view history and do theology from the perspective of the majority who were and still are crucified by these events, we cannot stand and simply appreciate the movement of the water from afar. We must plunge in with all the risks and asceticism that this involves.

4. In these reflections I am confining myself to Latin America because that is the reality that I now know best. However, much of what I say here may be applied to North America and the Caribbean.

5. The mestizo is used here to denote a people of mixed blood: The Spanish conquistador married or raped the conquered Indian. The children born of this union were neither indigenous nor Spanish. That began a new race, which had the characteristics of both groups. At first these children had a difficult time; both groups rejected them... The Spaniards labeled these children mestizos... Andres G. Guerrero, "La Raza: Product of Two Conquests" in Re/inking Columbus, A Special Issue of Re/inking Schools, Milwaukee, 1991, p. 72.

The word criolla is used to denote those born in Latin America of white, European background.

Resources on Columbus Quincentenary

The following resources are listed in Tapestry 2 No. 4 (Winter, 1991), published by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, Province of Wisconsin, Kansas.

RETHINKING COLUMBUS

Essays and resources for teaching about the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas.

Cost: $4.00 plus $2.00 postage

1001 East Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 964-9646

RESPONDING FAITHFULLY TO THE QUINCENTENARY

A study/action packet containing readings for worship service, bibliography, museum exhibit critique, lists of organizations planning to observe Quincentennial Discoveries.

Cost: $39.00


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Juan Diego and Catherine McAuley
Reflections and Insights

Linda Bechen, RSM

On April 9, 1990, Juan Diego was elevated to the status of "beautified" within the Church (Catholic Almanac, 38). This not only recognizes his status but also continues the cause of canonization and allows private celebrations and devotions to be held in his honor. On this same day, Catherine McAuley was noted as "venerable." This recognition realizes the beginning stages of canonization and opens this process.

These events are separate and significant in and of themselves, but they are striking. Spanning exactly three hundred years on the date of December 12, 1831 and 1990, we have two events that will have far-reaching consequences. The first was the revelation of the Lady of Guadalupe on the tilma of Juan Diego; the second the foundation of the Sisters of Mercy by Catherine McAuley. The experience of two, simple, ordinary people continue to serve as a focus of energy for thousands.

In this study, I will underscore some of the similarities between the experiences of these two individuals. Especially noted will be those experiences that were associated with the economically poor. With the advent of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, I will reflect on how the Guadalupe experience may speak to this new initiative.

Juan Diego was a poor Indian and is it to him that our Lady chooses to appear. She directly addresses who is to be his and his first words in this conversation, "I am the Virgin of the Aztecs" (Document, 3). Juan Diego is a product of his environment, an environment made wretched by poverty resulting from the Spanish conquest.

Ravaged by the plunderings of the Spanish for over ten years, the splendor of the Aztec tribe was in ruin. It is important to note that the conquest of the Spanish was not the only factor in the military might of the empire, it was also the result of the European disease which had ravaged the Aztecs. The history of the Aztecs included a series of invasions, with the empire dominated for over three hundred years on the date of December 12, 1511. The coming of the Spanish, and the consequences of their arrival, are tragic. The new enemies were associated with the economically poor with the result that the Aztec human sacrifice was further decreed to this.

Two central factors influenced the Aztec defeat. First, as a people they had become increasingly isolated by other indigenous groups. This was linked to the Aztec belief in human sacrifice which had altered the religion of Quetzalcoatl, the god of the east, who had come to bring a religion of simplicity, human dignity, and prayer.

The second factor was the memory of the Spanish conquest which impacted its social context. A rapidly growing population in need of subsistence was affected by the Spanish occupation. The Spanish missions continued the cause of canonization and allows private devotion.

Nineteenth century Ireland saw many factors which impacted its social context. A rapidly growing population in need of subsistence was affected by the Spanish occupation. The Spanish missions continued the cause of canonization and allows private devotion.

The missionaries typically utilized their native translators to communicate their own ideas, rather than learning from the people. The missionaries were hampered by their limited world vision which is especially illustrated by their quick recognition that the Aztec human sacrifice was diabolical. They failed to understand its deeper ritualized meaning within the context of the Aztec faith.

With the appearance of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, we see the seeds of Christianity being born. It is birthed within the context of the native experience and is meant to speak to their time and circumstance. I have spoken previously that the Virgin speaks to Juan and recognizes that he is a "nino" (little girl), "Virgenchita" (little Virgin), "Muchachita" (little girl), "Hi ja mi mejor" (younger daughter), "Seftora" (lady), "Madrecita" (little mother) and "la madre compasiva del pueblo," the compassionate mother of the people.

The appearance of Guadalupe resulted from the efforts of the Church to spread its message of Christianity being imposed upon the people. The activities of the missionaries often failed to recognize the personhood of the Indians, the faith tradition that was active in their lives, and rituals that expressed their belief. These failures of recognition colored the whole effort of evangelization. What followed was a period of conquest of the era - the conquest of Christianity sponsored by Spain, sanctioned by the Vatican, but at the expense of the Aztec culture and religion. The teachings of the Church were present in the new syndicate that the conquistadors built upon in the context of the people. The vast number of converts attests to a different kind of plunder efforts of this conquest which failed to realize the integration of Christianity with the culture of the people.

Catherine McAuley believed in ministering to the people in the midst of their daily lives and sent women into the streets. It is also within the context of Juan Diego's experience of poverty that Guadalupe appears and continues to be the poor translator of the Virgin. Catherine McAuley believed in ministering to the people in the midst of their daily lives and sent women into the streets. It is also within the context of Juan Diego's experience of poverty that Guadalupe appears and continues to be the poor translator of the Virgin. Catherine McAuley believed in ministering to the people in the midst of their daily lives and sent women into the streets. It is also within the context of Juan Diego's experience of poverty that Guadalupe appears and continues to be the poor translator of the Virgin.
impacts the truth to Juan Diego whose care it is to take it to the center of Christianity: He is to instruct the bishop from his experience (Boff, 3). This is in striking contrast to the missionaries who imported Christianity covertly and surreptitiously. The people came to missionaries within their mission compound. Guadalupe encounters Juan Diego on the hill sacred to his culture. The one who has been oppressed by the conquerors is now charged with the task of communicating the message of truth to the evangelizers. "He will not come with violence, but with words and flowers. It is this poetry coupled with the flowers that speak the truth of Guadalupe" (Boff, 3).

The image and the mission of Guadalupe reflect a new order which is not imposed by the powerful, but is birthed from the experience of the people.

The image and the mission of Guadalupe reflect a new order which is not imposed by the powerful, but is rooted in the desires of the people. The experience is one where dialogue, involves everyone, and invites rather than compels action (Boff, 4).

The new Institute of Catherine McAuley was an alternative to the experience of religious life of the nineteenth century. The women of the House of Mercy shared a common bond through their works. Catherine was firmly opposed to the Institute appearing as a convent primarily because of the enclosure that bound the Sisters of her day; the women of Baggot Street could "walk together, their appreciation of each person's contribution and in the belief of each other's good intentions. This was basic to being a forgiving and reconciling presence not only within the community but to those to whom one ministered. It was her firm belief that the charity, efficacy, and holiness of her work must be fostered and strengthened the Institute (Tender Courage, 100). It was "out of a loving, forgiving union with one another and out of the learnings that ensued that Sisters of Mercy have reached out in compassionate service to others, for mercy is but the overflow of charity" (Tender Courage, 101).

"Guadalupe...grants (people) the strength (for) what humanity speaking is impossible: for the illiterate, the powerless, the poor, and the oppressed to rise up against the powerful to bring about justice."

It is indeed this spirit of unity which impelled us, as Sisters of Mercy, to "walk together" in the Americas. This movement of women in our history is a moment in our history on July 20, 1991, through a new foundation — the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. This new institute speaks to one of the leaders of the early revolution, who declared poverty, and voice their cries against the powerful to bring about justice." (Bolster, 43).

"In the Americas, Guadalupe has served as a symbol..." (Elizondo, 110). Guadalupe was a similar sense of unity which not only gathered people together. As she acknowledged Juan Diego and the Lady of Guadalupe as a sign of their protection and liberation (Elizondo, 110). The cry for Mexican independence was: "Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe and down with the Gachupines" (peninsular-born Spanish). It is the Gachupines who are the land owners and control the country. Although they are powerful, they are few in number. The powerless included the Criollos, mulatos, Indians, mestizos could all identity with her. Her identity was not limited to one particular group, but she assumed the quality and characteristics of each. This unity laid a foundation for the alliance needed later to forge their independence as a nation.

In time, there was a growing hatred for the "Gachupines" (peninsular-born Spaniards). It is the Gachupines who are the land owners and control the country. Although they are powerful, they are few in number. The powerless included the Criollos, mulatos, Indians, mestizos could all identity with her. Her identity was not limited to one particular group, but she assumed the quality and characteristics of each. This unity laid a foundation for the alliance needed later to forge their independence as a nation.

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The directional statement of the Institute hints at this process but does not articulate the intent. This statement impels us "...act in solidarity with the economically poor, women seeking fullness of life and equality...and one another (mindful of) our multi-cultural and international reality" (Directional statement, par. 1). It further states that this commitment will impel us to "act from a multi-cultural, international perspective, speak with a corporate voice, work for systemic change, and call ourselves to conversion" (Directional statement, par. 2). This statement is framed in the context of Catherine McAuley's "passion for the poor" and animated by the Gospel. The aim of this — liberation — is not stated.

In the Americas, Guadalupe has served as a symbol of liberation. It is this liberation which I believe can speak to the new Institute. The symbol itself does not liberate, but it can be redefined as liberating, provided that the people involved realize this process is going on (Guerrero, 148). It gives "credence to the struggle and strengthens the people's faith and hope, and endurance in the on-going process of liberation" (Guerrero, 148). Guadalupe was a liberating message of her day. The Institute is to be that message of the 1990's. Both are to "...bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor in the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19).

Bibliography
Women have played an important role in maintaining the dreams of a people. Throughout the centuries the conquistadores and their daughters never lost the ability to wander through the market of dreams. While the commemoration of the quincentennial recalls the destruction of a people, it also signals the persistent spirit of the mestiza women of these lands to conquer their devastated past, and to build the present.

The present moment of history is being shaped by U.S. Hispanic women in their struggle to obtain greater participation in Church ministries. It is perhaps most apparent in the experience of Hispanic women who are married to deacons. Who are these women? What has been their involvement in the required formation programs for the diaconate? What types of ministries do they exercise? What are their dreams, and how do these dreams challenge present forms of ministry?

Wives of the U.S. Hispanic Permanent Deacons

Who are these women? The profile that emerges is that of women who, contrary to popular belief, in great number were born in the U.S. (49.6%). Others were born in their country of origin (50.4%) outside the U.S. The majority (88.9%) of the wives are U.S. citizens. The medium age is 54 years. The majority (40.9%) hold non-Church full-time employment, and 5.4% hold full-time Church affiliated positions. Another 6.4% are employed part-time by the Church. Generally, the salary received either in secular employment or Church related employment is low ($10,000 - $15,000).

A significant percent of the wives are Democrats (68.7%). They participated actively in the last presidential election, exercising their right and responsibility to vote. The majority of them (57.7%) voted in the last presidential election for the democratic presidential candidate. A great number of the wives held the belief that faith should influence their political choices and decisions (81.2%); a belief held only by 61.4% of their husbands.

The educational level of the wives reveals that the greater number (34.4%) graduated from high school, and that 22.1% have had some college level studies. Few of the women have an M.A. degree (4.9%) and even fewer have a doctoral degree (0.8%).

Wives' level of participation in diaconal formation programs:
Not all the wives have participated in the diaconate formation programs, but those who did participate (54.9%) found the programs generally beneficial (75.3%). The formation they received through these programs was important to them in the work place (50%), and even a greater number of the wives (81.4%) considered that the formation helped them in their ministries. While more than half of the wives (56.3%) felt that the programs prepared them adequately to face the reality of being a wife of a deacon, nevertheless, a good number of them still desire formation.

Present ministry involvement:
The question of who are and what kind of deacons is not important in itself, but that the formation and ministry of the permanent deacon dedicating an entire chapter to the aspects of married and family life of the permanent deacon. The directives state: "Even though it is clearly understood from the outset that the wife is not to be ordained, nevertheless her marriage and family are truly involved." The importance of the wife is verified in the findings of a 1981 national study of the permanent deaconate. In part, the results of the study demonstrate unquestionably the role of the wife in contributing to the degree of success experienced by the husband in the exercise of the diaconal ministry. However, it would be an injustice to reduce the wives' exercise of ministry to this companion role. Attention must be given to the women's own appropriation of ministry and to the types of ministry in which they engage.

There is an impressive variety in the ministries that these Hispanic women carried out. "For twenty years, we have knocked on doors in different areas and neighborhoods in our diocese trying to form small ecclesial communities."

Women by virtue of their non-ordained status find little room in sacramental forms of ministry, i.e., preaching, baptising, witnessing of marriage. Their participation in this area is limited to preparing others for the sacrament of reconciliation, confirmation and the catechumenean process (RCIA). In some parishes they prepare engaged couples for matrimony.

What is a treasured dimension of the ministry of the diaconate is in fact exercised to a greater degree by a substantial percent of the deacon's wives.

Ironically, this limitation has offered the wives the opportunity to excel in what has traditionally been one of the most treasured ministries of the deacon in the early Church — the ministry of charity. The first centurion, the deacon, while he was not an ordained deacon, was called by Jesus to exercise the ministry of charity. While the overwhelming number of women do not seek ordination to the diaconate, what is clear is the dream that they have to be recognized with human dignity. Their poignant words reveal some of their present experience:

"I would like to help you in your needs in these days of difficulty; give counsel to marriages in trouble. . . . I would like to work with alienated Catholics . . . Visit immigrants . . . Do missionary work with the poor . . . Participate in catechizing small groups.

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Sueños de Mujeres

These women have inherited the "dreams of marzipan or of cotton" of their ancestors, the Juana's, of the Conquistadors and of many lands. They have not lost the ability to dream of being recognized by a Church who bears the name of "Madre." These dreams are passionately expressed in their own words. These words voice their dreams to extend their ministry to the alienated and afflicted:

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While the overwhelming number of women do not seek ordination to the diaconate, what is clear is the dream that they have to be recognized with human dignity. Their poignant words reveal some of their present experience:
ways of dealing with the challenge of the diaconate. While these Hispanic women did not express greater personal interest in seeking ordination to the diaconate, nevertheless, that does not eliminate the interest of a few nor the duty of crediting them with studies earned through their participation in the diaconate formation programs. Essentially, these women stand as a constant challenge to the Church to consider anew the inclusive nature of ministry, and the equal recognition of the baptized in the life of the Church.

The centuries following the Conquistadores shattered past realities once belonging to thriving indigenous civilizations, but they have not conquered Juana’s ability to dream, to “select dreams, dreams of marzipan or of cotton, to sprout wings to fly with in sleep, strengthened by a treasury of dreams so enduring and plentiful no night will be long enough for them.”

Footnotes
2. Findings are based on the results of a sample survey completed by Hispanic women deacons.
5. Words of Hispanic women describing their present ministry involvements. The quotes that follow express other ministries exercised by these women.
8. J. Urdeix, ed., Conclusiones de I Encuentro Internacional sobre el Diácono en Dinamarca para la Comunidad, Centro de Pastoral Litúrgica, Barcelona 1979, 34.

10 This is a conclusion based on my study of the issue.
11. I have translated comments made by Hispanic women who are wives of Hispanic permanent deacons. In the body of this work, I will use a number of similar quotes from the same source.
12. Only two of the women expressed explicit interest in either the personal possibility of the diaconate for themselves or for women.

The New Evangelization and the Challenge of Fundamentalism
Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM

In this year of 1992, I am reflecting on the continuing mission of evangelization in the new world in light of the location of one of the earth’s California outposts of evangelization. Santa Clara University occupies the site of a mission originally established by Junipero Serra in 1777. We could say that the original mission served as a springboard for the new world’s achievement of an imagined success. A former third world culture has now, two centuries later, achieved transformation as a showcase of first world accomplishments in the heart of California’s Silicon Valley.

...we are experiencing a polarization between liberal and conservative approaches to the interpretation of scripture...

My task is easier than the first missionaries. In some respects it shares a similarity, because knowledge is the preoccupation of past twenty years. It has to be relearned in each generation; and that means starting from scratch. I sometimes think the technological revolution has done little to affect the basic condition of the human mind: when confronted with complexity, it seeks simplicity. When overloaded with data, it chooses to reduce rather than enlarge the parameters; when confronted with the burden of choice-making and solitary analysis, it prefers allegiance to an authority. One task of evangelization that impresses me as particularly urgent, besides the feminist agenda, is the need to confront simplistic analysis of scripture, challenge fundamentalist reductionism, and crack the "tape" that substitute coded formulas for the inquiry of genuine faith. In spite of all the advances made in biblical scholarship in the last twenty years, we are experiencing a polarization between liberal and conservative approaches to the interpretation of scripture, even within the Catholic Church. This trend that leads to the right rather than the left affects old as well as young. Professors of religious studies the last five or six years will typically say that they find their students "more conservative" than they themselves are.

My task, as a New Testament professor, is to teach the scripture at least six times a week, not to the indigenous peoples, but to the melding pot of twentieth century American students who represent the racial diversity of California. Recently in an undergraduate course on Pauline Letters and Theology, we were discussing the problem of sexuality. Passages touching the subject occur in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul discusses the mutuality characterizing the sexual relations of spouses, the matter of re-marriage, divorce or separations, and the consequences of this in civil, moral, and irreplaceable hole in that institution. I asked the class, "How do you think God judges this man’s life and contribution to Catholic education?" A student said, "God calls him the repentant sinner, and if he repeats he can be forgiven." I suggested that perhaps there were other views of this man’s life than the one implied by Paul’s condemnation in Romans 1:23-28.

Then we began to discuss Paul’s condemnation of homosexual practice with their own Mediterranean roots in the first century in the context of Ro 1:23-28. Several students in the class disagreed with my proposal that perhaps this particular passage in Romans did not say all there was to say about the situation of gay and lesbian persons in American society today. I cited Professor Lisa Sowle Cahill of Boston College, a laywoman who has proposed that sensitive ethical issues like homosexuality must be comprised within a four-fold framework that includes not only scripture and traditional formulations of doctrine, but the human experience of believers and the results of empirical experience of the human sciences. Students said, "Well, Paul said this is a sin, and anyone who chooses homosexuality is condemned." Then I told them the story of an admirable man I used to teach with, dedicated to Catholic schools, living on subsistence pay for 20 years, a support to his men and women colleagues, and a wonderful teacher and administrator. I felt his death from AIDS left a hole that is irreplaceable in that institution. I asked the class, “How do you think God judges this man’s life and contribution to Catholic education?” A student said, "God calls him the repentant sinner, and if he repeats he can be forgiven." I suggested that perhaps there were other views of this man’s life than the one implied by Paul’s condemnation in Romans 1:23-28.

Then one female student well versed in the rhetoric of “sola scriptura” (scripture alone), turned to the last chapter of the Book of Revelation and read out loud: "I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: if anyone adds to them God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words in this prophetic book, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are the subject of this book." (Rev 22:18-19).

I turned with a smile and said to her, "Well, it looks like I’m in trouble, is that what you are saying?" She nodded a solemn, self-assured yes. The following
class, taking up the pose of Joan of Arc, I playfully held out my hands and joked a bit, in order to get discussion going. “Last class, I was about to be burned at the stake. Won’t anyone rescue me?” The student, just as playfully, made a gesture of throwing a lighted match at me. “Well,” I said, "The message is clear. I guess this is it. Burn, burn baby!”

The anecdote illustrates the logical conclusion of policies generated by a "critical hermeneutic" approach not only to moral issues, but to expressions of cultural diversity within the human as well as Christian community. As we reexamine the effect of 500 years evangelization on the new world, we become aware that certain effects, for good and for ill, inevitably flow from a community's interpretation of its scripturally-based mission, and the hermeneutic or interpretive system that governs that interpretation and application to contemporary life. Scriptural texts, of course, are simply words on a page until they are interpreted.2

Scriptural texts . . . are simply words on a page until they are interpreted.

Each of us also operates with a "canon within a canon." Rather than the whole bible, parts of scripture inspire our reflections and activities. We are familiar with this dynamic within our own culture, and see certain passages which are a "canon within the canon" for a time of seeking God's consolation in prayer. When we read an episcopal document, we also recognize that some scripture passages are chosen as a reference point rather than others. This alerts us to the "convenience" or "inconvenience" of references to the creation accounts in Genesis 1-3, the relation of men to women in the post-Pauline epistles, or texts about Mary in Matthew and Luke's infancy narratives.4

Evangelization inspired by a biblical vision has been grounded in scriptural oration, with the tone set for pastoral ministry in a given historical period. The church's history provides us with examples of heroic action undertaken in fulfillment of Christ's mission to preach the gospel to all nations that launched a mission to the new world for Christ.5 Saving souls meant defeating the enemy and rescuing them from the demon of paganism. The victory decreed in the human sacrifices of indigenous peoples was actually replicated, we would now say, by the violence done to a people's entire language and culture when it was "enforced" and replaced by Christianity.

The paradoxical result of the missionary enterprise is this: the cultural heritage of the Mayan and Aztec was simultaneously preserved in the same missionary activity. In his historical study The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes the missionaries who were interested in communication of the faith through education, from the conquistadors who were motivated by the acquisition of wealth. To the credit of the missionaries, they were the first to actually learn the language of the conquered people of Mexico. For example, by 1536, the Franciscan, Sahagun, had learned Nahautl, and taught Latin to the sons of Mexico's Native community. His publications reflect "an intermediary role between the two cultures," and in his chosen role as a bridge between two worlds, he presented Christian faith in the Indian languages within the socio-political conditions prevailing in a given century thousands of years earlier. In many ways, these texts served as a series of "proof texts" for doctrinal formulations about the existence of God, and the superiority of Christianity over all other belief systems.

Since Vatican II, there has been an effort by Catholic scripture scholars to rethink the meaning of revelation, inerrancy and inspiration.

According to such a doctrine, "proofed" by scripture, the Catholic Church was the only faith community legitimated by God's will, successor to a Judaism which was now succeeded by the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Free-floating passages of scripture could be cited as proofs for arguments over doctrine and the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.6 Whatever the assent to the truth. Faith is belief in the truth. To authorize or validate the authority of salvation.

Fundamentalist Hermeneutic

1. Faith is propositional, an assent to certain fundamental truths. What God says in scripture is all that is needed for believer's salvation. Jesus died for my sins, saved me from damnation, and when I declare him my personal savior, I will be saved. Baptism is the expression of assent to the truth. Faith is belief in the truth. To have faith means to accept the authority of salvation.

2. The true church or community of believers is composed of people who hold the same truths as the authoritative preacher of Christianity, and don't deviate from God's word in scripture as that is interpreted by the magisterium.

3. Tradition is like teeth. What a believer acquires at an early age is meant to last all one's life, the more mature of the two.

4. All of scripture is directly God's word of revelation, and God speaks the truth for all historical periods, cultures and peoples. What scripture means at the literal level is clear to the ordinary believer. All of
scripture is harmonious, and passages written 3,000 years ago are no different from pages written 2,000 years ago. What a passage meant then is the same as what the passage means now. Christ is the same "yesterday, today and forever" as far as doctrinal definitions go.

5. What a person should do can be proved from individual texts of scripture, no matter where the passage comes from. Scripture alone is sufficient as a guide to solving contemporary moral and ethical problems, refuting doubt, and setting the terms for conversion.

6. God is the authority, omnipotent and powerful, who will judge the people according to their faith in his word and obedience to his commands, as those are communicated by leaders in the church.

7. Good Christians never make mistakes about what God's word means when they rely on scripture. Faith means never being wrong about what God wills for other people, what sin is, and who will be judged good and bad, saved and damned.

Historical Critical Hermeneutic

1. Faith is an inquiry, full of questions and uncertainties about the real meaning of God's will and God's word. Certainty lies in God's benevolence and respect for those who in faith involve critical thinking, and ability to live with ambiguity and process.

2. The church includes all sorts of difference. Pluralism seems to be God's will.13 God loves all people as those created in the divine image. God has mysterious ways with human beings who seek the holy one through a variety of spiritual paths.

3. Tradition is like cells in the body, always renewing and regenerating themselves as the person grows.

4. All of scripture is a human mediation of God's word, which must be understood within the conditions of historical periods, cultural biases and political-social perspectives before it can be "applied" to today. Scripture has many levels of meanings, literal and metaphorical. Care must be taken to identify the literary form of the passage. Scriptural passages often conflict with one another.

5. "Proof-texting" is an inadequate approach to complex moral problems of the twentieth century. Scripture and tradition often have something to say to issues, but these must be accompanied by data from the experience of the human community as well as scientific discovery.

6. God is the revealer who astonishes us by a divine humility, an incarnation which entrusts what is divine into human hands.

7. History indicates that even well-meaning believers have made tragic mistakes in their interpretation of scripture, causing untold suffering and injustice to other people in the name of God's word.

I do not know whether my students in Pauline Theology will allow me to live or insist that I be burned. All I know is that by one hermeneutic my chances of continuing life as a feminist theologian are slim; but according to the second, my chances of starting another academic year are better.

Footnotes

1. For an analysis of broader trends which inevitably affect the interpretation of scripture, see Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, "The Unholy Alliance Between the Right and the Left in the Catholic Church," America 166/15 (May 2, 1992), pp. 376-382.


4. It is interesting to observe the reduction of scripture references and "proof-texts" in the most recent version of the pastoral on women, when compared with the previous two versions. See "Third Draft of U.S. Bishops' Proposed Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society: Called to Be One in Christ Jesus," Origen 21 (April 23, 1991), pp. 761-776.


7. This metaphor suggesting the energy needed for preaching the faith also served to describe a person's spiritual life. As those familiar with Jesus spirituality know, the second week of the exercises of Ignatius Loyola proposes a "meditation on the two kingdoms" in which one chooses to fight on the side of Christ, whose generalship rivals that of the enemy general, Satan (Exx 136-48). See my critique of this exhortation in "Women and the Exercises: Sin, Standards and New Testament Texts," The Way Supplement 70 (Spring, 1991), pp. 21-26.


10. Ibid, pp. 147-182. This section discusses Las Casas' conflicts with Cortés, and his preference for the solution to the conflict over settlement of the Indians to be managed by the missionaries, not the soldiers. See the new translation of Bartolomé de Las Casas The Only Way in the Sources of American Spirituality series, edited by Helen Rand Parish and translated by Francis Patrick Sullivan, S.J. (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992).
I have thought a lot about what I might share with you today. It is not surprising, per­
examp le, of Marie Augusta Neal's work over the many important analyses offered that help us to inter­
pret our experience, our past and our future (I think for example, of Marie Augusta Neal's work over the years, of the work of Mary Jo Leddy, Patricia Winberg, Sandra Schnellders, of our own sisters who have provided theological, psychological, and socio­
logical analyses as we try to make sense of our possi­
ibilities and our calls to the plight of these and many others raise questions and provide recommendations that I could incorporate explicitly into what I say now. In the end, however, I found myself entitling my comments with the biblical saying, "One thing only is necessary." (Luke 10:42) But in a way that title is my conclusion, not my starting point, so let me begin with many things. I shall try first to share with you some early brief comments and then move around the three commitments at the heart of the Direction Statement from the Institute General Chapter. I shall then offer two further considerations organized in relation to the biblical texts, (1) "Can you drink the cup?" (Matthew 20:22, Luke 10:38) and (2) "Put your finger here, and see my hands; put your hand into my side; doubt no longer, but believe." (John 20:27)

1. "We commit our lives and resources"
A. To the Economically Poor
In the words of Sister Catherine McAuley's commitment to the poor, grace sometimes
vincingly the historical centrality of Catherine McAuley's commitment to the poor. Grace sometimes
comes from surprising sources, and here it came from a Vatican-appointed representative to our Chapter; an
emissary who, like Jesus, came over to the side of those who are supposed to serve. As she spoke of this
very obvious, commitment in the very foundation of our community, I sensed that most of the difficulties
the Chapter might have. The reason for this regard was already laid to rest. And so it proved to be.

b. To Women
But the second aspect of our direction, our second commitment (to women seeking fullness of life and
equality in church and society) combines well with the first. It seemed to me that this commitment did not
come as peacefully as the first — not surprisingly, per­
haps, since fewer regional communities had previously addressed it, and there was not time at the Chapter to
clarify different meanings of feminism or different
economics fueled by unchecked capitalist interests, and it has brought new and for some peoples terrible forms of
chaos. In our own country we experience growing unemployment and general economic decline, and
cities whose problems of crime and drugs are a micro­
cosm of the new international order.

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ideas or positions of feminist or radical economic ideologies present within the Chapter membership.

Promised Grace sometimes becomes a disappointment, as the new challenges, greater than any we have
seen before,

Grace sometimes comes from surprising sources, and here it came from a Vatican-appointed representative to our Chapter; an emissary who, like Jesus, came over to the side of those who are supposed to serve. As she spoke of this very obvious, commitment in the very foundation of our community, I sensed that most of the difficulties the Chapter might have. The reason for this regard was already laid to rest. And so it proved to be.

... now more than ever we must live and be in solidarity with the economically poor.

The ending of the cold war (a good and welcome event in its own right) has disturbed international
processes fueled by unchecked capitalist interests, and it has brought new and for some peoples terrible forms of
chaos. In our own country we experience growing unemployment and general economic decline, and
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I. "We commit our lives and resources"
A. To the Economically Poor
In the words of Sister Catherine McAuley's commitment to the poor, grace sometimes

18
...any movement depends not only on its nucleus, its core group of committed participants, but also on those at its periphery.

Third, I have wondered what difference it would make to our self-understanding as a religious community if we could forge bonds with individuals and groups not only as a "way of life" but as itself a "movement."

There is much in our history and in the history of religious orders generally to suggest such an interpretation of what we are about. I first had this thought when about five years ago I asked a student of mine about the status of the movement at Yale against apartheid in South Africa. Her response was that any movement depends not only on its nucleus, its core group of committed participants, but also on those at its periphery. Today our core is not so large as it once was, but the periphery is growing. If we are in any sense a religious movement (even analogously), then we may not only interpret our own situation differently than we do; we may have much to offer in both wisdom and sustenance to others, particularly to the contemporary women's movement.

However strange these considerations may seem to you, my point is to suggest that a commitment to stand in solidarity with women in their struggle for life and equality, in the church and society, may ask of us new and different things than we have heretofore imagined. But we shall perhaps only know this as we continue to walk with women of all classes and races, all national backgrounds and faiths, all ages and experiences; and as we share their tears and weep our own, not in final desolation but in the river of action.

c. On One Another

This leads me easily to the second commitment in our Direction Statement, our commitment to one another as we embrace our multi-cultural and international reality. This, as I understand it, was a commitment to some extent to pay the price of the reality of the Institute as a new community (of previously separate congregations) and to learn the ways of faithfulness as an international and multicultural community. The former rose out of both the joys and the strains of a first attempt to be one community forged out of many. The latter rose out of the experienced presence of sisters from many countries and the struggle along with them to recognize both diversity and community. These are, I think, two related but quite distinct commitments.

On the one hand, a commitment to grow into community with individuals and groups newly met, is necessary if the Institute is to live a full life and serve a common mission. Moreover, everyone desires, and has the right to, develop forms and nourishing frameworks. This can foster growth and makes it possible to call to one another for friendship and for partnership for collaboration and support. It also makes possible an expansion of our understanding of what "community" can mean for us. For example, community has always existed on at least three levels: local community, friendship, and the wider province and national community.

On the other hand, a commitment to forge bonds with individuals and groups, to one another as friends, to friendship, to partnerships, to collaboration and to support. It also makes possible an expansion of our understanding of what "community" can mean for us. For example, community has always existed on at least three levels: local community, friendship, and the wider province and national community.
emerges from the commitment we have made to a preferred option. Every poor one of the struggles we have had with this commitment is that it creates a kind of competition among sufferings. We struggle to understand that bodily miseries demand our primary attention and resources. Is it not only that the suffering to end the suffering that might be like his own; but rather: "Can you drink the cup that I will drink?" The cup to be shared is for the cup of suffering of all persons. If we are to drink this cup, we are to partake of the sufferings of everyone else. But if we are to do this, if we are to do more than recognize the broken and the materially poor, if we are to partake of the sufferings of all persons. If we are to drink this cup, we are to partake of the sufferings of every other. Else. But if we are to do this, if we are to do more than recognize the broken and the materially poor, if we are to comprehend the whole Christ. What a clue we may have for opening the wounds of every person. Let Christianity bring its good news without prejudice ordain ministry to women or to married persons; when we protest that it is unjust to exclude gay persons; when we insist that it is unjust to remain entitled to many things: to stand with women, to embrace the causes of women, to take one offerings, of those with whom we have committed our side. Do not doubt, but believe." The disciples, and Thomas among them, are to recognize Jesus by his wounds. Jesus can be recognized, his presence can be believed, in the wounds of every person.

If we are to partake of the sufferings of all persons, if we are to comprehend the whole Christ, then we must present to those in power not merely our arguments or even our testimony; we must present to them the wounds, the sufferings, of those with whom we have committed ourselves to stand in solidarity. There is hope that when others touch these wounds, when they behold them and reach into them, when they behold them and touch these wounds, when they behold them and reach into them, they will recognize Jesus Christ. They will cease to doubt, and believe. They, too, will hear the voice of the poor, attend to the stories of women, let Christianity bring its good news without doing violence to the peoples around the world. To suggest such a "strategy" is not to subject those who suffer to a new form of voyeurism, not to sentimentalize the possibilities of human response. It is only to recognize that private pain must become public pain, that the personal wounds of many may be the political problems of all. Whoever can "touch" may also believe, for there is grace and power in the wounds of the body of a risen, though still stenched, Lord.

Conclusion: The One Thing Necessary

I began my considerations by saying that I had engaged the problem of the question: "Our Times Only Is Necessary." This indeed my conclusion from the many things I have been trying to understand. We have committed ourselves to many things: to stand with the economically poor, to embrace the causes of women, to take one institutions and to society as a whole.

In the story of Jesus's encounter with Thomas after the resurrection, there is a clue as to how the Spirit of God makes belief possible. As he had done with the rest of the disciples, Jesus now shows Thomas the nail prints in his hands, the wound in his side, "Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand in my side. Do not doubt, but believe." The disciples, and Thomas among them, are to recognize Jesus by his wounds.
Footnotes
1. See Gregory Baum, "Good-bye to the Ecumenist," The Ecumenist 29 (Spring, 1991), 1-3.
2. Baum, p. 2.
3. Baum, p. 3.
4. It is worth pondering here Baum’s conclusion: “Christians for whom faith and justice have become intertwined will want to keep their networks, centers, and institutions alive. They will continue to search for opportunities to involve themselves in action.” p. 3. What this should mean for us in the concrete making of a new faith a new future, believing in a transformation promise of God is ‘Thou shalt, thou canst, love God for the sake of a lifestyle; a lifestyle is for the sake of any of its works, for ‘Were you merciful?’ will be a derogatory term, and at any given point in time it represents a dynamic relationship that may or may not have anything to do with ‘hierarchy.’
7. Her point was that there must be a strong periphery if the movement is to make a difference. When the periphery diminishes, the movement can remain, but it will be largely latent in its power to fulfill its aims as a movement. By our periphery I mean particularly the new forms of membership being developed by the Sisters of Mercy. But the notion can also extend to the variety of ways in which we collaborate with non-members. ‘Periphery’ here is precisely not a derogatory term, and at any given point in time it represents a dynamic relationship that may or may not have anything to do with ‘hierarchy.’
8. One regional community, Detroit, recognized the importance of trying to do this. At an all-community meeting it tried to concretize the presence of its Argentine members by incorporating their tape-recorded contributions. This points to the need for further imaginative measures to bring together the Sisters of Mercy from many cultures and nations (and to do this in ways that do not use those from other cultures and nations to serve once again the agendas set primarily by those in the dominant culture and nation).
10. I refer here to the feminist theologian, Mary Daly, who is the author of such influential works as Beyond God the Father (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

Questions for Study/Reflection
1. Women’s reflections don’t figure significantly in century-related literature about Columbus. What “dangerous memories” or aspects of women’s experience would you imaginatively “supply” to discussions of Columbus’ culture and times, land and people of the Americas, and the impact of his journey and subsequent conquest?
2. What “naming” of the 500th centenary of Columbus’ voyage describe the benefits and limitations of the work on behalf of Mercy that you are presently doing — e.g. discovery, encounter, conquest, evangelization, colonization . . . ? What word suggests a metaphor for your current form of spiritual energy?
3. How does the liberating message of the Institute’s directional statement get communicated where you work? Do the people you serve express in any way their consciousness that this process of liberation is going on? What personal vision of Guadalupe animates you: new light on the feminine, on the politically oppressed, on the economically poor, on the church itself?
4. As the number of priests declines, parish life in the Catholic church is involving the contributions of more and more laity. What are your own feelings about this shift from a priest-based, sacramental church to one high-lighting laity-led ministries? What anxieties? What hopes do you have?
5. Fundamentalism in any religious tradition stresses conformity to a code of belief and obedience to authority. “Critical thinking” represents a departure from allegiance to “true faith.” Do the policies of the institution where I live or work lay stress on conformity or invite participative and critical reflection? In what values about conformity/critical reflection am I like my family or different from them?

Contributors
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Linda Bechen, RSM, (Cedar Rapids), has worked as community organizer in rural Iowa for two years, and as a junior high language arts and religion teacher for thirteen. Presently she is working on her M.Div. (Master of Divinity) at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She plans to return to her work in Iowa after finishing her degree.

Ana Maria Pineda, RSM (Burlingame) has an M.A. in theology from Catholic Theological Union, where she is completing her fifth year as a faculty member and director of Hispanic Ministry. On December 12, 1992, she became the first U.S. Hispanic woman to acquire an S.T.D. in Pastoral Theology from the University of Salamanca in Spain. Her publications have appeared in Church, New Theology Review, and Missiology.

Margaret Farley, RSM (Detroit) is professor of Christian ethics at Yale University Divinity School. Margaret is a well-known speaker on feminist ethics and she has been widely published in journals of ethics and religion.