



# *Mercy Illuminates*

FACULTY PRESENTATIONS

*Mercy Illuminates*

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## FOREWORD

*M. Therese Antone, RSM, President*

**T**he mission of Salve Regina encourages the community to “seek wisdom and promote universal justice.” Emanating from the goals of the founding Sisters of Mercy, the University mission calls us to move from fact to knowledge toward wisdom, and to inspire others to strive with determination to “work for a world that is harmonious, just and merciful.” The education we provide must, therefore, extend far beyond the earning of a degree; beyond the abundance of facts or a wealth of information. It must incorporate lasting values and address the heart and soul as well as the mind.

It is a distinct honor and privilege to express my gratitude to the faculty of Salve Regina for continuing the rich heritage on which the University was founded. Their efforts to embrace mercy and weave its spirit into the curriculum contribute significantly to promoting the enduring vision of our founders. The 60th Anniversary Faculty Symposium, *Mercy Illuminates*, was the result of faculty discussions, over the course of several years, on the virtue of mercy. It is just one example of how the faculty demonstrates the importance of making the University mission a vibrant living document that guides an education grounded in the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy. I give special thanks to the members of the faculty who made presentations at the symposium and contributed to this publication.

On behalf of the University community, I also wish to thank Sister Leona Misto, Vice President for Mission Integration. Working behind the scenes, she has generously and creatively encouraged and facilitated the building of community and mission awareness. Through her efforts, faculty, staff and students continue to gain a deeper appreciation for the goals set forth by the founding Sisters of Mercy.

As we progress on the path toward wisdom and the realization of justice, may we with courage, creativity and hope continue to be bearers of the torch of learning fueled by the spirit and virtue of mercy. ❧



## INTRODUCTION

*Dean E. de la Motte, Ph.D., Vice President for Academic Affairs*

The title of this volume of essays, *Mercy Illuminates*, is taken from a symposium held on the campus of Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island, on April 23, 2008, in celebration of the institution's sixtieth anniversary. Most of the texts that follow were presented that day in an earlier version. The epilogue of *Mercy Illuminates* is a paper presented by Sister Leona Misto, Vice President for Mission Integration and Planning at Salve Regina, at the Conference of Mercy Higher Education in June 2008.

The phrase we have chosen for both our symposium and this volume attempts to capture our community's efforts to foster the *illumination* of all that we do – teaching, scholarship, service to the community – with the charisma of the founding Sisters of Mercy. Of course, as these essays clearly demonstrate, there is no single or easy definition of “mercy.” It is our hope that this modest volume suggests just some of the richness that proceeds when faculty and staff from a range of disciplines bring their scholarship, intellect and wisdom to bear on the meaning of mercy in relation to the history, culture, religious and philosophical origins, academic work and community service of our institution.

The Mission Statement of Salve Regina University, in three short paragraphs, moves from its founding (i.e., its history and reason for being) through its primary educational purpose (i.e., the academic work it *does* with students), to its ultimate contribution to society through its students, who are encouraged to work for “a world that is harmonious, just and merciful.” To some extent, *Mercy Illuminates* mirrors this tripartite division of our identity. In Section I: “The Legacy and Meaning of Mercy,” philosopher Lois Eveleth reflects broadly on the concept of mercy and its translation into goals for Mercy colleges and universities in her essay, “A Legacy of Mercy.” Theologian Jayme Hennessy explores the significance of changing images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy, from early medieval times to

the present, for “the identity and mission of the present-day Salve Regina University.” It is appropriate that we begin, as a Catholic university, with the foundational disciplines of philosophy and theology, but also that both writers make explicit a tendency one sees throughout this volume, and indeed throughout the history and mission of Salve Regina University: to connect academic work to the wider world, to unite theory and practice, and to assure that learning is always, in ways both direct and indirect, connected to the greater good.

Part II: “Justice, Mercy and the State,” includes considerations from three very different disciplinary approaches – the literary, the political, and the historical (though two of the essays, by Symeon Giannakos and Timothy Neary – might be called “historico-polical” rather than fitting neatly into one or the other category). However, each in its own way touches on the quality of mercy and how it relates, to use Paula Bolduc’s paraphrase of Machiavelli, to “the good of the state.” Her “The Cruelty of Mercy: Oxymoronic Paradoxes,” is a literary discussion focused on the tension between cruelty and justice, and the paradox that true mercy must often include aspects of the cruel. Her wide-ranging discussion touches briefly on Seneca, Machiavelli and Montaigne, but its most extended consideration is of the character Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Symeon Giannakos, in his “Mercy and Human Security: Emerging Values in International Relations,” explores the development of the concept of human security and infuses it with “the concept of mercy in an attempt to demonstrate its universal applicability.” Finally, Timothy Neary, in “The Rhetoric of Mercy: Do-Gooders, Corporatists, and Warriors,” traces the development of three key political movements – Progressivism, The New Deal, and The Great Society – and their impact on subsequent American history, including the present day and the presidential election of 2008.

Part III: “Mercy Illuminates: Learning Service and Service-Learning,” presents two final papers, these focused on practical efforts to infuse not just the classroom, but the experience of faculty and students *outside* the classroom, with our institution’s mission. The first essay is a case study presented by three members of the Business Studies and Economics Department, Judith Keenan, Arlene Nicholas and Traci Warrington, entitled “Merciful Practices of a Business Program: Looking In – Reaching Out.” It recounts their efforts to integrate the University’s mission into their departmental activities, from curriculum to service-learning opportunities

for students, with a particular emphasis on the latter. The department's success in this area has been remarkable. We are proud of the fact that an area of study so often connected at other institutions with careerism and individual gain is, at Salve Regina, tirelessly committed, through its requirement of business ethics but especially through its service-learning opportunities, to encouraging students to work for a world that is just, harmonious, and merciful. Our volume closes with "Mercy Spirituality, the Foundation for Compassionate Service," reflections by Sister Leona Misto, our Vice President for Mission Integration and Planning. Her essay explains how our emphasis on mercy spirituality in faculty development, curriculum, and service-learning all spring from Catherine McAuley's devotion to works of mercy, which in turn derive from the Christian tradition of "loving-kindness," incarnate in Jesus Christ and already present in the covenants of Hebrew Scripture between Yahweh and the People of Israel.

Sister Leona's essay brings the volume full circle, connecting our Catholic and Mercy origins with our ultimate reason for being, and giving practical examples of how faculty, students and administrators alike daily live the mission of Salve Regina University, and how we can all work to strengthen it.

As we celebrate the first 60 years of our institution and all that has been accomplished by the Sisters of Mercy and their colleagues, we are also mindful of the work that remains to be done, and have faith that the guiding principles of Catherine McAuley, especially in such uncertain times as these, will continue to inspire, enlighten, and *illuminate* our common purpose. ❧



## A LEGACY OF MERCY

*Lois Eveleth, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy*

Having a legacy is having a past that matters to you. If *Salve Regina's* past has emerged from the heart of the Church, it has emerged also from the heart of Catherine McAuley. That we should be able to comprehend all at once and clearly the past that we have inherited, the past that has shaped us, is, however, doubtful. Rather, our understanding and insight come gradually, not only because we are human and often distracted and forgetful of the past, but also because the heritage itself undergoes some changes. All human and living entities must change. So it is with a legacy. It is contextually defined, in that it must derive some of its traits from the time, place, and circumstances of each embodiment, even while the cultural landscape keeps changing. Each generation, while reflecting on its past, adds one more reiteration of that past. Each reiteration through the years broadens that legacy, adding nuances that earlier generations might not, or could not, have suspected or anticipated.

There are two parts to my reflections today. First, I offer a perspective into a most important element of our legacy, i.e. the concept of mercy. Then I offer a translation of this concept into goals for our colleges and universities.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. Typically the priest and the Levite get bad press, but they are essential to our legacy and deserve better of us. Insert into your consideration of the parable all the prescriptions scattered throughout Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers regarding contact with corpses and contact with blood and with bodily discharges. Were the priest and the Levite to help this poor wretch lying in the road they would be ritually unclean and forbidden from entering the temple. The procedures for purification were lengthy and often onerous, and the two men would be prevented from fulfilling their obligations during that time. When they walked around him at a safe distance, they were obeying the law; they were men of justice, men of the law. They present an image of justice, of correct process.

The parable was an answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" We would expect the answer, now and as well as back then, to be family, tribe, friends,

those in physical proximity. By placing a Samaritan into his parable, Christ is negating all those usual criteria of ‘neighbor.’ We might have answered, “If so-and-so is my neighbor, then I should care about his well being.” The parable exactly reverses this relationship: “If I care about so-and-so, then he is my neighbor.” Neighbors, then, are not genetic or geographic accidents. Neighbors are not found, they are formed; they are among the best of human achievements. We humans ‘create’ our neighbors by establishing this caring relationship. The number of neighbors, then, is virtually infinite. No one need be excluded.

While the priest and the Levite are images of justice, the Samaritan is an image of mercy. Justice is concerned with form, procedure, and process, but mercy is concerned with outcomes. The priest and Levite were doing their duty, but the Samaritan went far beyond any possible duty into the realm of the heroic. Justice is defined by the boundaries of one’s community. It is like a blank check on which each age, each polis, each tribe, or each nation fills in the amount it needs, at that time and in that place. In justice, one’s neighborliness has clear boundaries; it is a closed system of discourse and values. Justice is a minimum requirement and can be enforced. Humans, though, usually need far more than the minimum; and mercy, being a move into the heroic, cannot be required or enforced.

Mercy is a creating of neighbors, as if there were no boundaries of any kind – not wealth, nor status, nor ethnic, tribal, or national identity, not political power, not educational attainments – none of these. The beat-up wretch lying in the road is my neighbor if and only if I care about his well-being, care about the outcomes and realities of his life. This creation is heroic, given our natural propensity to self-absorption and our American predilection for rugged individualism.

Though justice and mercy are distinct, they are not separate and they do indeed need each other. If justice is a framework of the body politic, mercy is its soul. If justice is the form, mercy is the dynamism. Neither justice nor mercy is sufficient for human well-being, but both are necessary and, when joined, they are together sufficient for this well-being.

Because mercy is a form of heroism, it springs from the agent’s generosity and creativity. It cannot be required but moves beyond what is required, beyond law, beyond public policy, and beyond duty. Mercy has the same positive, life-affirming goals as justice; it lies on the same scale of value as justice. But those who are merciful stand at the growing edge of what the

community sees as good, the point beyond which justice need not go, the point at which the creativity of mercy envisions that, yes, more is still possible. Mercy, in short, “pushes the envelope” of society’s values.

I said earlier that a legacy is contextually defined and that it derives some of its traits from the circumstances of each embodiment. Consider Mercy colleges and universities as one such embodiment. I find that our Catholic/Mercy legacy shapes our academic goals in at least two significant ways and turn now to each of these.<sup>1</sup>

#### FAITH IS INTEGRATED WITH LEARNING

Usually the word ‘faith’ is confined to its theological connotations. A faith in Christ and His church, though, is not confined to Christ and His church but is even more generic. It will also be a faith in larger realities, such as the perfectibility of a human being, a faith in the possibility of transforming both persons and nature, and a faith, especially, in ideals.

Who told us, after all, to have faith in ideals such as peace, equality, and liberty? To be hopeful that humans can achieve these at all? Where are there societies in history that achieved peace, equality, and liberty for all their citizens? Such dreams are a matter of faith. We must have faith not only in, for instance, the Trinity, but also in our ideals, whether for the working women of nineteenth-century Dublin or the poor of Newport, Rhode Island. Such faith will hold that humans themselves are a work in progress; it will be optimism that people can be liberated from whatever chains, real or metaphorical, hold them back. It will “push the envelope” of society’s values.

A Catholic intellectual tradition may or may not have any one trait that is absolutely distinctive and unprecedented. Non-sectarian colleges, after all, also urge their students to work for social justice; they too offer courses and establish internships in community agencies. We have no monopoly on social justice. With us, however, such commitments are not recent or trendy or politically correct. What is different, I suggest, is the willingness and determination to see every task, every subject, and every discipline through the lens of faith. Faith is not merely an assent to creedal statements; it is, rather a deliberate stand, a permeating optimism, an embrace of every iota of creation as God’s own work. And we too say, with the Creator in Genesis 1, “It is good.” We engage and apprehend this creation. We create knowledge of it – creating knowledge is surely part of our cosmic homework, in this garden of ours. This knowledge and this faith must cooperate; they must be on speaking terms, at

least. And we will someday, each in his or her own appointed time, bring this knowledge of creation with us when we at last “shuffle off this mortal coil.”

#### WE CAN IDENTIFY MORAL QUESTIONS

Those who are part of a Catholic and Mercy university will recognize moral questions and moral dimensions within complex issues. There is nothing neutral or one-dimensional about education. Those who try to present life, knowledge, or education as value-free perform a peculiar kind of reductionism, one that cheats and misleads our students. An education that is Catholic and Mercy should lead the student to see the moral significance of social realities. Nothing important is morally neutral; only trivia are so. We cannot improve human lives if we foster the myth of value-free knowledge and value-free education. Reform becomes impossible. How can we achieve the best, if the best does not exist?

We want to think that graduates of our universities know that realities like poverty, ignorance, lack of opportunity, the unequal distribution of resources, and powerlessness do have moral relevance. Such realities are not morally neutral; they are not inevitable and unavoidable by-products of social evolution. We want to think that our graduates realize that people are responsible for their inaction as well as their action. If there are human causes to a problem, there will be human solutions. We hope that our graduates know all this.

It is surely a truism that our understanding of our legacy is influenced by the concerns and issues of our own epoch and its circumstances. The concerns and issues of higher education must be the object of our most enlightened efforts. Our students are not usually lying beaten and bloodied on the road, but I think that the challenges of their generation are in many ways more intractable than a straightforward case of assault and battery and robbery.

In conclusion, there are the two traits of our legacy that are very important: that faith is integrated with learning and that we can identify and engage in moral questions. They are not sufficient, but they are necessary. We retain a faith in ideals, no matter how quixotic the striving may seem at times. We have faith in knowledge itself, in the goodness of knowledge. We hold on to an enthusiasm for it, as well as a hope that we will be wise enough to use it well. I suspect that Catherine McAuley would have recognized and approved of this reiteration of her ideals.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted here to Stephen Trainor, who first identified such goals. See his “A Delicate Balance: The Catholic College in America” *Change*, Vol.38, No.2 (March/April 2006): 14-21.

**SALVE REGINA, MATER MISERICORDIAE:  
IMAGES AND IDENTITY**

*Jayme M. Hennessy, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies*

When the University community gathers to celebrate the matriculation and graduation of our students at the Convocation and Commencement ceremonies, we join our voices to sing the University hymn: Salve Regina. In this nineteenth-century rendition of a twelfth-century plainchant we intone:

*Hail, Holy Queen enthroned above – O, Maria.  
Hail, Mother of Mercy and of love – O, Maria.  
Triumph all ye Cherubim. Sing with us ye Seraphim  
Heaven and Earth resound the hymn....*

Usually we seem to catch the triumphant tone of the hymn and joyfully belt out the closing line: Salve, Salve, Salve Regina! Putting enthusiasm aside, I often find myself wondering about the significance and meaning of these medieval titles and images of Mary for an American Catholic University in the twenty-first century. In our present day, the religious devotions and Catholicism of the European immigrants who staked out their own place in American culture has ceded to an “American” type of Catholicism, which does not offer its adherents access to the cultural experience of identifying with an earthly Queen, much less a “Holy Queen enthroned above.” At best, we can generally imagine some idea of Princess—thanks to the media images of Diana and the magical world of Disney. Those endearing images of princesses, however, seem tied to rather negative ideas of queens as old women struck with jealousy, and sometimes inclined towards evil. Further complicating the access of most American Catholics to the significance of the Marian images within the tradition is the decline or discouragement of Marian devotions that followed the reforms of Vatican II. Add to this situation the tendency of feminist theologians to treat the traditional Marian images as a means of perpetuating the patriarchal

oppression of women through conveying impossible ideals, and these images of Mary, then, seem at best irrelevant and at worst problematic. What then to think of the images of Mary in the *Salve Regina* hymn for our University community in the twenty-first century? Do these images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy have any significance for the identity and mission of the present day *Salve Regina* University, or are they merely pious notions or quaint artifacts of medieval European Catholicism?

I propose that the task before us is the reinterpretation of these images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy for the identity of the University in the historical reality of our present day. The intention of this paper, then, is to initiate that interpretive project by treating the images of the *Salve Regina* hymn as symbolic images, whose significance and meaning for the identity of the University call for further examination. My work here is but the opening of a conversation about these images with the hope that others will contribute to this interpretive project. Towards that end, I briefly develop the foundations of this task, and initiate the processes of retrieval and reinterpretation that can lead us to exploring the particular identity in the history of *Salve Regina* University in relation to the claims of the present day. To put the project simply: What does it mean when our Alma Mater is the *Mater Misericordiae*?

#### I. FOUNDATIONS: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

“Who I am” has everything to do with “what I do.” Approaching the relationship of the name “*Salve Regina*” to the mission and self-understanding of the University in the twenty-first century, involves understanding if, or how, the symbolic images offered in the chant and prayer have any significance for the self-understanding of the University community. Contextually, the study falls neatly into the concerns of the field of virtue ethics, which strives for the harmonization of actions with one’s character or identity. Simply put, virtue ethics attends to the cultivation of character and the processes by which this character is developed. In this model of ethics, a person consciously aims to develop his or her identity/character, and then proceeds to shape this character through the practices, habits, virtues and affections that serve as both the means and end of this life-long project. The formative task of virtue, while creative and dynamic, rarely starts with a blank slate. Persons mature and develop within a community that communicates and maintains a certain set of virtues,

values, and affections through its stories and symbols. The character or identity of both the community and its individual members, then, are matters of construction, which take place within the context of historical claims of the present day and the traditions maintained by the community.

### 1.1 VISION AND REALITY: SALVE REGINA COLLEGE

The name “Salve Regina College” held particular significance for the founding Sisters of this University who sought to establish a Catholic institution of higher learning for young women. Granted a State Charter for a College in 1934, the Sisters spent the following thirteen years praying the Salve Regina, as they sought Mary’s assistance in securing a campus for their mission. Their prayers were answered in 1947 with the gift of Ochre Court from the Goelet family and the Bishop of Providence. Thus, what had formerly existed as a vision was finally a tangible reality embodied in the limestone walls of Ochre Court, the collected texts for the library, and the hearts and minds of the students and their Sister professors. With deep gratitude to Mary, the Sisters named the college “Salve Regina.” Its name honored not only the advocacy of Mary, the Queen of Heaven and Mother of Mercy who had delivered a stunning mansion to the Sisters, it also honored the faith of the Sisters who found in Mary a partner whom they could trust to support them in their work of mercy – educating the women prohibited access to the Catholic colleges of the day – just because they were women.

What we may fail to realize in this story of vision and piety is that these images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy may have offered the Sisters and young women of that day a vision of a powerful woman who acted in the public arena. It was a model of womanhood not usually found in the images that characterize American life in the late forties and throughout the fifties, and early sixties. During these post-war years, the culture attempted to return American women to domestic life after their contributions to the workforce and armed forces during the years of World War II, through what Betty Friedan termed the “Happy Housewife Syndrome.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, it was against this backdrop of images of the “Happy Housewife” provided in media like “Father Knows Best,” and “Leave it to Beaver,” or “the Loony Housewife” of “the Lucy Show” that the Sisters of Mercy, and the young women who came to Salve Regina, envisioned the possibilities for women that upheld their capacity for scholarship as well as

their potential to contribute to the public life of the country.

Approaching the name, and thus the identity of Salve Regina University in this present day, sixty years after the founding of this University, we do so in a social and cultural context that differs from the reality of its founders and the young women who formed its first class of students. Even though we may find ourselves connected by faith and hope to the vision of the Sisters of that day, we cannot assume that the same extends to our understanding of the particular significance of the University's name and its mission in the present day. Thus, the images of Mary presented in the University hymn and their significance for the identity of the University call for both retrieval and reinterpretation. Just as the founding Sisters of the University, and very likely the young women students who attended Salve Regina in those first few years of the college, found or constructed some significance and identity of Salve Regina for their institution, the same task falls to us, today: the task of bridging the gap that stands between the 12th century medieval world that gave rise to these Marian devotions and titles and the claims of our own historical context.

#### 1.2 RETRIEVAL AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE MARIAN IMAGES OF THE SALVE REGINA: WHY AND HOW?

In taking up a study of these medieval titles and images of Mary and their relationship to the identity of the University, the question arises: "Why bother with probing the significance of these quaint medieval religious symbols?" We bother to retrieve and reinterpret these symbols because of their role in the construction of communal identity. In some sense, what we proclaim in song, voice in prayer, or symbolize in visual images is tied to our self-understanding as an academic community. Moreover, these Marian titles presented in song, prayer, and visual image were never just titles for Mary, but a matter of identity and identification for the Christian community in history that generated these images. These devotional images of Mary were symbols through which the medieval community came to discern their identity within their historical context, as they embodied and prompted the affections and virtues deemed essential to Christian life in that day.

Sociologist Clifford Geertz has observed the function of symbols for preserving and expressing the way a community both understands and acts in the world. Symbols, according to Geertz, are not "mere expressions,

instrumentalities, or correlates of our biological, psychological, and social existence; they are prerequisites of it.”<sup>2</sup> Operating, in a sense, as the building blocks for social construction, symbols not only serve to aid in the construction of a social reality, they offer members of a community a means of participating in this reality because they serve to instantiate the beliefs, affections, and values of a community.

While the observations of Geertz are addressed to the cultural reality of religion in general, the contribution of Christian devotional images or texts to the construction of communal identity has been examined by Rachel Fulton, David Morgan, and Paul Lauritzen who treat, respectively, textual devotions, visual piety, and the role of emotions in communal and Christian formation. Pursuing a sympathetic analysis of the devotions of the medieval world, Fulton has proposed that the Marian devotional texts of the times reflect the efforts of medieval Christians to discern their identity in history. To paraphrase Fulton, the images of and devotions to Mary were the tools forged by medieval Christians, to help them know how to feel, to develop the emotions and the dispositions deemed essential to the Christian life.<sup>3</sup> When viewed as a part of a process of discerning emotions, these images reveal a community probing the significance and shape of compassion for the Christian life. Creating images to plunge deeper into the human dimensions of the Incarnation, examining the realities of embodiment and vulnerability shared by the Incarnate God and humanity: images that synthesize the love of God, love of Neighbor, and love of Self with compassion. These different images, then, assert particular affective claims on the viewer as medieval Christians examine the significance of the Incarnation for their lives.

What David Morgan literally brings into focus is that the visual images associated with religious beliefs are not merely illustrations of religious ideas or hopes: these visual symbols and visual practices contribute to the construction of a particular and concrete social reality.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the traditional images of Mary as Holy Queen or Mother of Mercy contributed to the construction of a particular social reality in their own day through presenting affections and beliefs that contributed to the self-understanding of late medieval Christians, who identified with these images of Mary.

Finally, the cultural construction and communication of values, affections, and identity in the observations of both Fuller and Morgan is not a *fait accompli*. Paul Lauritzen has observed that the role of the community

in constructing and maintaining its identity is not a matter of the past, but an ongoing process. Communities discern in their own specific historical context the lived claims of the Christian narrative, and accordingly cultivate and communicate the affections constitutive of Christian identity in history. These affections that arise from this synthesis of narrative and life, are what Lauritzen terms “cultural artifacts” given that they are “culturally mediated or constructed experiences that are shaped by, and crucially dependent upon cultural forms of discourse, such as symbols, beliefs, and judgments.”<sup>5</sup> The combined insights of Geertz, Fulton, Morgan, and Lauritzen provide the foundation for approaching these medieval Marian titles and images as cultural artifacts and symbols that contributed to the formation of Christian identity. Participating in the affections instantiated in these cultural artifacts and symbolic images, then, contributed to the construction of both the social and personal identities of the communal members, who located themselves either within or without the world created and sustained by these artifacts.

### 1.3 RETRIEVAL: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

It is one thing to recognize that the textual and visual images presented to us in the *Salve Regina* hymn contributed to the construction of social and individual identity in the medieval world, and another to propose that we understand the significance of these images and their relevance to the identity of *Salve Regina* University in the twenty-first century. The problem before us is the 800 years of history and culture that cautions us against blithe or naïve assumptions as to the meaning of these titles and images in the context of the medieval world. Nancy Netzer reminds us that our knowledge and experience of these images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy is fundamentally fragmented, since our study of these images is often severed from their ritual context, thus “when the context of the signifier changes, what is signified may be altered.”<sup>6</sup> However, taking up the task of retrieval I follow the work of Margaret Miles who insists that the meaning of an image lies primarily **within** the image, within its access to the “inner experience” of life. This “inner experience” of the images which Miles references involves the emotions that are embodied in and expressed through the image.<sup>7</sup> Thus, while these images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy arise from a particular context and have a particular meaning, their significance is not closed to the viewer in the present-day. We can retrieve

some understanding of their meaning. There is some experience of emotional identification that arises in this engagement of the devotee with the visual or textual image, as she understands herself in relation to the stern authority of the Queen or the comforting compassion of a tender mother. In concurring with this proposal of Miles, I would suggest that although she limits her comments to the meaning of images, her insights are applicable to the emotional experience encountered in a devotional text or song.

Finally, given the limitations of this paper, my efforts of retrieval are focused primarily on the image of Mary as the Mother of Mercy, an image that seems more accessible and significant for a twenty-first century American-Catholic community than the Marian image of Holy Queen. Moreover, it is due to her role of the Mother of Mercy and her own *compassio*, her co-suffering with Christ on the Cross, that Mary gains the title of Holy Queen or Queen of Heaven. Although I leave the retrieval of the image of Mary as Holy Queen to a later date, I find it helpful to begin a visual analysis of the images of Mary as Mother of Mercy with the image of enthronement in order to examine the relationship of the image to the identity of the devotee. Moving from the *Throne of Wisdom*, I take up a brief analysis of the events and images that portray Mary as the Mother of Mercy, and provide a foundation for reinterpreting this important image of Mary offered in the *Salve Regina*.

#### 1.4 ENTHRONEMENT AND IDENTITY

The interpretations of the enthronement theme in Marian imagery vary in their mood, appeal to regal authority, and depiction of the humanity and relationship of Mary and Jesus. One of the earliest treatments of the majesty of Christ and Mary is found in the *Throne of Wisdom* (FIGURE 1), sculptures that emerged in the Carolingian period and emphasized the royal dignity and power of Mary and the Son of God, and served also to infuse the power of the Throne with the power of God.<sup>8</sup>

The *Throne of Wisdom* sculptures present Mary as a Capetian Queen who serves as the throne through which Christ asserts his authority over the Kingdom of the earth.<sup>9</sup> In this particular example, the artist has clearly attempted to stress the bond of humanity that Mary shares with Christ through careful attention to the similarity in facial features. The sculpture is quite formal in its presentation of Mary and Christ, as befitting an audience with any Queen and her son and King. The rigidity of the

sculpture and the symmetry of the carving invest the image with a sense of order and perfection that intensifies the power of the figures and the threat of judgment. All of these characteristics combine to establish a sense of distance between the viewer and the divinity and power of Christ, who is presented as ruler, lawgiver, and judge. The law book missing from the hand of Christ, the rigid symmetry of the figures, his figure centered and squarely facing the viewer, their emotional detachment<sup>10</sup> all combine to identify the viewer as a subject who is sworn to reverence and obedience. One may seek favor or mercy from Jesus, but in kneeling or standing before this image the viewer identifies herself as subject and sinner confronted with the imminent reality of divine judgment.

Over time, as the humanity of Mary comes into focus, these images of enthronement will be softened by depictions of the love shared by Mother and Son. This emphasis on the humanity of Mary is evident in the Italian interpretations of *The Madonna Enthroned*. This painting by Duccio (FIGURE 2) presents Mary as a noblewoman, rather than queen, thus reflecting the social organization of the Italian city-states. Whether one is engaging the image of Mary as Holy Queen or Noblewoman, the engagement is a matter of identification, through which the devotee comes to understand herself in terms of the power and authority embodied in the image, and, in some images, the beauty of the Madonna and her child.

## 2. IDENTIFYING WITH THE MOTHER OF MERCY

Medieval devotions offer at least two different understandings of Mary as the Mother of Mercy. The earliest devotions tend to focus on the event of the Incarnation, with Mary as the Mother of the Mercy of God: the Mother of Christ. In these devotions she is more a vehicle or medium for the enfleshing of divine mercy, than an agent of mercy, although that point does merit further discussion. Later images, like the Cloak of Mercy, tend to focus on the mercy that Mary offers to those who suffer, or for the sinners facing the judgment of Christ and the possibility of eternal damnation. It is fascinating to watch the increasing agency of Mary, relative to the growing interest in her humanity, which marks the devotions of later medieval Christianity.

In the following images we can see some aspects of Mary's motherhood of Mercy. The *Eleous* icon and the Fra Angelico's interpretation of the Annunciation event both portray Mary as the one who bears the Mercy

of God into the world. The Ravensburg *Madonna* depicts Mary's Cloak of Mercy, thus emphasizing her own merciful actions in a rather subversive interpretation of Mary as co-redeemer.

### 2.1 MOTHER OF THE MERCY OF GOD

This twelfth-century Byzantine icon is typical of the genre (FIGURE 3). The images serve to make the divine Mercy of God present to the viewer, thus they function as a window through which we glimpse the divine. Here we encounter the mercy of the God become flesh. The scene is purposely tender, as the God who has become flesh presses his cheek against his mother's, the woman who has shared with him her flesh. Mary, here, is the Mother of the Mercy of God, as the event of the Incarnation has overcome, to some extent, the distance between the divine and human.

### 2.2 THE ANNUNCIATION

In this fifteenth-century painting, Fra Angelico depicts Mary's "Yes" to the Angel Gabriel, the messenger who presents Mary with her call to play her part in salvation history (FIGURE 4). His portrayal of this moment teases out the intimacy of this experience, while placing it in the cosmic drama of Salvation. The modern viewer may interpret the image as a depiction of passive compliance with God's will, thus missing the intense drama of this moment as Mary begins her work as the co-redeemer of humanity. Placed within the context of the fallen world, Fra Angelico presents this scene of the Annunciation and Incarnation as a moment in time in which Mary's answer will change everything. Here, Mary becomes the Mother of Mercy, enfleshing the divine redeemer who will save humankind from sin and eternal death. Fra Angelico emphasizes this moment of recapitulation in which obedience to the divine will redeems us from the disobedience of the Fall. We see Mary and Gabriel juxtaposed against the sad figures of Adam and Eve as they are banished from the Garden of Eden. The ray of divine light, symbolizing the creative power of God, diagonally cuts across the scene, unifying the pairs of Adam and Eve with Mary and the angel Gabriel. We see Adam and Eve bent with shame, driven forward by the Angel, whereas Gabriel and Mary are bent towards each other with reverence, sharing the same visual plane. In this manner Fra Angelico brings forward the collapse of the distance between the human and divine instantiated in the event of the Incarnation, and emphasizes the

capacity of the human for divinization, for the actualization of the Image of God within the person.

This painting is but one of Fra Angelico's interpretations of the Annunciation story. In his scenes he is consistent in his depiction of the symbolic details traditionally found in the late medieval and renaissance paintings of this New Testament scene: the creative and animating light of divine power, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the angelic messenger, and the text of the Old Testament scriptures on Mary's lap. Later we will see that a number of these elements have been preserved in a contemporary interpretation of the Annunciation event by Patty Wickman.

### 2.3 THE MADONNA OF MERCY

This wonderful sculpture of the Ravensburg *Madonna of Mercy* depicts Mary as the one who acts with mercy (FIGURE 5). When Christians turned to Mary, here, as the Madonna or Mother of Mercy, they sought the love and care of a mother who would never turn them away or abandon them to suffering. She was their advocate who could soften the judgment of Christ against the sinful, and if that failed, you could hope that she would enfold you into her cloak of mercy and sneak you past Christ and into heaven.

Amy Neff, in her article "The Pain of Compassio: Mary's Labor at the Foot of the Cross" (1998), addresses the active compassion of Mary that unites her to the redemptive suffering of her son, as well as the suffering of humanity. Neff proposes that the *co-passio* of Mary, in later medieval paintings of the *Passion*, presents Mary's suffering as a physical sharing in Christ's passion: the 'pain of childbirth' through which Mary gives birth to the community of believers, her children for whom she is "mother, protector and intercessor."<sup>11</sup> Note the profound difference between this sculpture of Mary as the Madonna of Mercy and the majestic representations of the Queen at the beginning of this study. Where the images of Mary as Queen establish distance and embody stoic power, this image presents an accessible and tender woman who will protect those who seek her care. Where images of Mary as Queen claim the devotee's obedience, fealty, or perhaps even fear as subject of a Holy Queen, these images of the Mother of Mercy evoke love and tenderness, and establish a rather intimate relationship between the devotee and Mary.

These three images of Mary as the Mother of Mercy provide a small

sampling of the richness of this tradition and how these images engaged the devotees and contributed to his or her self-understanding within the Christian community and the historic reality of the larger world. What emerged towards the close of this Marian tradition in the late medieval world was a profound sense of the importance of compassion in the Christian life. Rachel Fulton, in her study of the devotional texts of the period, proposes that the various images of Mary that stressed the humanity of her motherhood and her compassion for her son: "...schooled religiously sensitive men and women in the potentialities of emotion, specifically love, for transcending the physical, experiential distance between individual bodies – above all, bodies in pain."<sup>12</sup> Through these images of Mary's love, Christians came to identify with the potential of love in their own lives, particularly the compassion that was so needed in the chaos of their own world as the Black Death ravaged the European continent. The question remains: "What might these images offer to us in our own world?"

### 3. REINTERPRETATION OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF MERCY

The last ten years have witnessed the efforts of Elizabeth Johnson, Ivone Gebara, and Maria Clara Bingemer to develop a Mariology that refrains from the divinization of Mary, while uncovering the prophetic dimensions of her life, and her commitment to the Kingdom of God.<sup>13</sup> While these efforts are valuable in recovering the historic and liberating character of the biblical person of Mary, the work of Els Maeckelberghe in reinterpreting the devotional images of Mary is more pertinent to our project at hand. Leaving behind a thorough analysis of Maeckelberghe's project, let it suffice, for now, to note that she uncovers the complexity of Mariology and its images, observing that the tradition is not at all monolithic, and does not necessarily perpetuate patriarchal ideals that contribute to the oppression of women. Adapting the symbolic theory of Paul Ricoeur, Maeckelberghe treats traditional Marian images as symbolic images whose meanings are not fixed in time, but determined by the interpreting subject. Key to Maeckelberghe's methodology is the role of women in consciously reinterpreting the traditional images of Mary from their own experience, rather than defaulting to the meanings constructed in the past by the interpreting community of males, who have brought their own gendered experiences and expectations to these images.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Maeckelberghe insists that this interpreting community cannot be limited

to professional theologians, it must include the women who are outside the academy, thus awarding their experience of these images adequate consideration in the process of reinterpretation.

Following Maeckelberghe's method, I propose that identifying with the image of Mary as the Mother of Mercy is a matter of identifying with the human capacity for bringing mercy to life in this world. I offer the following thoughts in order to initiate the long overdue process of reinterpretation of the image of the Mother of Mercy, thus to discover or construct the significance of these images for the present-day identity and mission of Salve Regina University.

### 3.1 MARY AND THE ANNUNCIATION: BEARING THE GOD BECOME FLESH INTO THE WORLD.

"Aren't there annunciations of one sort or another in most lives?" queries Denise Levertov in her poem of the same name.<sup>15</sup> Levertov finds in Mary, a model of human openness to the revelation of the divine, reminding us that we are each called to play our own part in the dynamic event of the Incarnation, of the ongoing reality of the God become flesh. The Word of God's mercy proclaimed by the Prophets is the Word become flesh in Jesus Christ, the Word that Mary bore within her own body, the word that was "flesh of her flesh." The motherhood of mercy in the Annunciation reminds us that this "yes" voiced in freedom demands more than assent to a creed, it entails the embodiment of mercy, the willingness to enflesh some portion of the mercy of God in our communal existence. Whether we embrace this encounter with the Word of God, or turn from it in "... dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair and with relief" the fact remains that the choice is ours to make.

The intersection of the divine revelation of the Annunciation into the experience of the "ordinariness" of our lives is evident in the work of some contemporary artists who bring into focus the intimacy of the revelation of the Incarnation, as well as the ongoing reality of this event. The vibrant oil painting *Annunciation*, by the Jamaican artist Michael Parchment, offers a reflection on this biblical event from the perspective of Caribbean culture (FIGURE 6). Parchment creates a scene that differs from the traditional medieval paintings in its lack of formality and gravity. Here he presents a scene of divine-human friendship and co-operation as Mary and the Angel are joined hand-to-hand- in an informal and happy embrace.

The painting heightens the sense of the “ordinariness” of this extraordinary moment with its sense of intimacy and friendship, as well as the symbolizing fertility and life through the fruits and food that lay at Mary’s feet- all while a cat sleeps cozily at the periphery of the work.

Taking this sense of the extraordinary breaking into the ordinary to another level is (FIGURE 7) the painting *Overshadowed* by Patty Wickman. Here a young woman gazes with curiosity and some sense of caution at the exposed and brightly glowing bulb of a table lamp that illuminates her youth, and the utter messiness of her room. The basic setting seems to resemble an ordinary college dormitory room, yet borrows some of the symbolism of Fra Angelico’s interpretation of the Annunciation Event. We see the figure of the Holy Spirit in the bird shaped shadow projected upon her body. In the lower right hand corner of the scene lies a phone, a rather ordinary means of communication, when contrasted with the angelic messengers. The scene depicts a moment of illumination breaking into the disheveled reality of room and of life. This is the moment of the Annunciation- not in some beautiful garden or room- but in the chaos of our ordinary existence. We are faced with the message: what will be the answer? Will we say “Amen?” Will we allow the Mercy of God to become enfleshed in our lives?

### 3.2 MARY AND THE CLOAK OF MERCY: COMPASSIONATE SOLIDARITY AND ADVOCACY

The Cloak of Mercy today remains a sign of love and compassion in a world that remains battered by suffering and injustice. Yolanda Lopez in a delightful reinterpretation of the the iconic Virgin of Guadalupe offers us a compelling vision of what it means to be the children of the Mother of Mercy, and find ourselves under her cloak (FIGURE 8). This is a cloak that empowers as well as protects. To identify with this Mother of Mercy is to identify with power of compassion and justice as they enter into the world with hope and joyful expectation for the possibilities of a world transformed by love.

The medieval images of Mary’s compassion and mercy for those who suffer or fear the judgment of Christ reveal her ties to her children and her influence with Christ. To identify with Mary, the Mother of Mercy in these contemporary images does not encourage us to cultivate a childlike passivity in the face of our own troubles or the problems of the world. These images compel us to recognize the capacity of the human person for acting

with mercy. We have been redeemed by mercy and called to become persons of mercy. Mercy, then, both given and cultivated is, in a sense, the birthright or obligation of every Christian.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: IDENTIFYING WITH MARY, THE MOTHER OF MERCY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

At the beginning of this essay I raised the question: “What does it mean when your Alma Mater is the Mater Misericordiae?” Allow me to suggest that there are at least three identifying characteristics of a community that identifies with Mary, the Mother of Mercy: compassion, advocacy, and hope. As Salve Regina University we are called to identify with the compassionate love that Mary held for Christ and our fellow human beings. Because of her love for Christ, she is the advocate of those who long for relief from their suffering, and for those who hunger and thirst for justice. Her motherhood and her compassion compel her to care for all humanity. Thus to identify with the Mother of Mercy, today as a University community is to know that we have been called to solidarity with the suffering of persons in the world, and to act with compassion for the relief of this suffering. We do so by cultivating the civilizing affection of compassion in our students, and embodying this compassion in our communal relations.

It is this compassion, then, that compels us to advocacy for those whose voices are not always clearly heard in our world. By virtue of education, and the political and social influence this education yields, we bear the responsibility of advocacy for those whose causes and needs are either ignored or rendered inadequate representation and recognition. Finally, to identify with Mary, the Mother of Mercy is to know not only the suffering of the world, but also the hope of redemption and transformation. In the twelfth century, St. Bernard of Clairvaux penned an imaginative reflection “The Whole World Awaits Mary’s Reply,” in which he depicts the how the biblical patriarchs anxiously hoped that Mary would say “Yes” to Gabriel and God’s plan of salvation would unfold in the world. This hope for redemption and transformation is sorely needed in a world flattened by greed, violence, war, and injustice, a world in which indifference and despair may seem more palpable than love and mercy. As a University community we know the tides of history and the fortunes and misfortunes of humanity: as a Catholic University community we also

know the “now and not yet” eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God as it continues to unfold in this world.

On this sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Salve Regina University, let us pray that Mary, the Mother of Mercy will continue to intercede for this academic community, and that Christ’s love and mercy will continue to transform the hearts and minds of its students, faculty, and staff. Let us follow Mary’s example of cooperation with the mercy of God, so that we will embody compassion, advocate for justice, and offer hope to those who long for the continued transformation of this world with the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God.



FIGURE 1. *Unknown Artist, Throne of Wisdom, ca. 1150-1200.*



FIGURE 2. *Duccio di Buonisegna, Rucellai Madonna, ca. 1285.*



FIGURE 3. *Unknown Artist, Virgin Eleousa, ca. late 13th c.*



FIGURE 4. *Fra Angelico, The Annunciation, ca. 1426*



FIGURE 5. Michael Erhart,  
*The Ravensburg Madonna*, ca. 1480



FIGURE 6. Michael Parchment,  
*The Annunciation*, ca. 1990



FIGURE 7.  
*Patty Wickman,*  
*Overshadowed, 2001*



FIGURE 8. *Yolanda Lopez,*  
*Self-Portrait of the Artist as the*  
*Virgin of Guadalupe, 2002*

## IMAGES

FIGURE 1. Unknown Artist, *Throne of Wisdom (Sedes Sapientiae)*, 1150-1200, wood sculpture, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[http://www.metmuseum.org/works\\_of\\_art/collection\\_database/index.aspx?dep=17&vw=0](http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/index.aspx?dep=17&vw=0) (accessed April 7, 2006).

FIGURE 2. Duccio di Buonisegna, *Rucellai Madonna (Madonna en Maestas)*, 1285, tempera on panel. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Web Gallery of Art. <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html> (accessed October 12, 2006).

FIGURE 3. Unknown Artist, *Virgin Eleousa*, ca. late 14<sup>th</sup> century, Icon. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/virg/hd\\_virg.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/virg/hd_virg.htm) (accessed December 11, 2007).

FIGURE 4. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, ca. 1426, tempera on wood. Museo Nacional del Prado, Spain. <http://www.museodelprado.es> (accessed April 18, 2008).

FIGURE 5. Michael Erhart, Ravensburg *Madonna of Mercy*, ca. 1480, painted limewood. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html> (accessed October 12, 2006).

FIGURE 6. Michael Parchment, *The Annunciation*, ca. 1990, oil on cardboard. <http://www.aviscarrbeanart.com> (accessed April 10, 2008).

FIGURE 7. Patty Wickman, *Overshadowed*, 2001. In *A Broken Beauty*, ed. Theodore Prescott, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.

FIGURE 8. Yolanda Lopez, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*, 2002. Acrylic. <http://www.udayton.edu>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Norton Press: New York, 1963.) See Chapter Two for Friedan's observations on this period.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Book, 1973), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 197.

<sup>4</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Lauritzen, *Religious Belief and Emotional Transformation: A Light in the Heart* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Netzer, "Collecting, Re/collecting, Contextualizing and Recontextualizing: Devotion to Fragments of the Middle Ages" in *Fragmented Devotion: Medieval Objects from the Schnutgen Museum Cologne*, eds. Nancy Netzer and Virginia Reinburg, (Chestnut Hill: Boston College, 2000), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 76.

<sup>8</sup> Ilene H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 6. Forsyth teases out the rather complex relationship between the Throne of Wisdom and the authority and legitimacy of the Carolingian Emperors. This sculpture aligns the throne of the ruler with the throne of both Christ and Solomon, thereby witnessing to the divine right of kings and the relation of the Emperor through Christ and Solomon to divine authority.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. Although it may be visually evident to the contemporary viewer that the humanity of Mary has been transformed into the throne for Christ, the significance of this throne, for the medieval viewer is not visually accessible to the modern person. Forsyth observed that “for the Romanesque period Mary clearly figured the Throne of Solomon. She held in her lap the New Testament counterpart to the wise King of the Old Testament, the incarnation of Divine Wisdom, the Word become flesh.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Forsyth proposes that the detached and rigid demeanor of this image reflects the Royal Deportment “in his imperious aloofness he recalls the vivid description which Ammianus Marcellinus applied to the attitude affected by the emperor Constantius in procession at the time of this triumphal entry into Rome: “and looking straight before him as though he had his neck in a vise he turned his eyes neither to the right nor to the left, as if he had been a statue.”

<sup>11</sup> Amy Neff, “The Pain of Compassio: Mary’s Labor at the Foot of the Cross”, *The Art Bulletin*, 80, (1998): 14. Neff describes how the physical suffering of Mary, embodied in the ‘swoon’ of some Passion imagery emphasizes both the death and rebirth that takes place at the Cross. Some of the Marian traditions held that although Mary was spared the pangs of labor in giving birth to Christ, she suffered great physical pain at Calvary. There at the Cross she experienced the labor pains through which she gives birth to the Church, and becomes co-redeemer of humankind: “When contemplating Mary collapsing next to the Cross, the Christian viewer could feel compassion for her sorrow and understand that this sorrow enabled Mary to be mother, protector and intercessor.”

<sup>12</sup> Fulton, 197.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 313-315.

Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Binagemer, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 99.

<sup>14</sup> Els Maeckelberghe, *Desperately Seeking Mary: A Feminist Appropriation of a Traditional Religious Symbol* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Denise Levertov, “The Annunciation”, [www.chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/levertov.htm](http://www.chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/levertov.htm) (accessed April 10, 2008).

**THE CRUELTY OF MERCY:  
OXYMORONIC PARADOXES**

*Paula Bolduc*

There is a tradition in the Middle East of telling teaching stories in which Nasrudin is the key character. The stories are humorous and derived from the wisdom of the Sufis, as well as from Persian, Arabic, and Turkish cultures. The stories are as timeless and universal, as the lessons they teach. The following brief Nasrudin story best expresses the fundamental idea in this essay.

One day Nasrudin's boat overturned. Nasrudin did not know how to swim and nearly drowned when, just in time, a local fisherman saved him. From that day on the fisherman pestered Nasrudin for this and that, constantly reminding him of the fact that he had saved Nasrudin's life. Finally, after years of this, the beleaguered Nasrudin wailed, "I wish I had drowned! That would've been less cruel."<sup>1</sup>

Mercy is not what it seems. I argue that mercy is accompanied by cruelty, though not always, and to do that I turn to the wisdom of Seneca, Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Shakespeare. My primary examples, however, focus on what Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* says and how she says it.

The mercy that Shakespeare and Machiavelli identify is not capricious or blind. Mercy is not always good for the people, writes Machiavelli in *The Prince*.<sup>2</sup> Machiavelli reasons that there is a necessity for "cruel mercy." What he wrote is something like a practical "How to Rule Wisely" manual for first-year princes. Chapter 15 of *The Prince* addresses the proper conduct and the judicious use of cruelty and mercy in order to be kind:

But, it being my intention to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it, it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of a matter than the imagination of it; for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen.<sup>3</sup>

Machiavelli's ultimate concern here is the good of the state. Real mercy is both merciful and cruel, and to be used only if the situation warrants it. For Machiavelli, the ruler who lives by virtue alone "soon meets with what destroys

him among so much that is evil;” and a dead prince is a failed state. As there is no day without night, there is no mercy without cruelty. Although the relationship between mercy and cruelty is enough to boggle the mind, one thing is for sure: mercy without cruelty does not work.

At the end of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, a wiser Portia returns to Belmont and deploys what here is referred to as “cruel mercy.” Machiavelli and Shakespeare knew well that the truly “noble,” and, of course, the “well-read” (the creative reader), would find judicious application of cruelty not only practical, but also kind. In what they write there are echoes of the ancient wisdom of sages like the first-century stoic, Seneca. In his essay “On Clemency” Seneca writes: “A ruler’s clemency in itself makes men ashamed of wrongdoing, and punishment seems more grievous if it is inflicted by a kindly man.”<sup>4</sup> The “clemency” that befalls this ruler’s subject, though it may fall “as the gentle rain,”<sup>5</sup> is not exactly benign. Similarly, Montaigne believed that virtue is “something nobler than the propensity for good.”<sup>6</sup> In his essay, “On Cruelty,” Montaigne explains that the good that is done to others out of unreflective “natural mildness and good nature” is naïve and untested. With this idea in mind, it would seem that Shakespeare, who read Montaigne, fashioned Portia in the mold of Montaigne in *The Merchant of Venice*.

It is not out of some benign “happy disposition” that Portia argues most effectively in Venice’s court of justice. On the contrary, she is thoroughly “provoked and stung to anger.” Who would not be annoyed with such reactionary seekers of revenge as Shylock, Gratiano and company? But, Portia takes in hand her indignation and uses what “weapons of reason” she has. The interesting thing here is that not only is she outraged at Shylock, but also at the meddlesome Antonio and the impetuous Bassanio. In the end, Portia manages to save the lives of both the Christian Antonio and the Jew Shylock, but not Shylock’s freedom of conscience, or his reputation and, most likely, his livelihood. Moreover, we should not forget that Portia is, from now on, Bassanio’s guarantor of financial well being.

If all we hear in Portia’s legal argument is the sweet melody of Christian mercy, then we are selectively deaf to the plainness and brutish ordinariness of her language. Moreover, we might ignore, as well, what Lorenzo calls in the play’s final act, her “bad voice.” This “bad voice” refers to the cry of a cuckoo, the bird that was associated in the Elizabethan period with adultery and betrayal. This reference to the cuckold underscores the vulnerability of human relationships as well as the need to examine our assumptions about

national, sexual, ethnic, and religious differences by listening more closely to those who think, act, and believe differently.

In this essay, Portia's "bad voice" is that of the "moral outsider." Like the cuckoo that lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, a sort of fowl-usurper (Pardon the pun.), Portia makes illicit use of Venice's judicial system; she is a fraud who deliberately appropriates mercy to her own ends. The suspicion is that Shylock, as an outsider, is already corrupt, liable to take advantage, and concerned ultimately only with the welfare of his fellow Jews. Their voices, nonetheless, are also the voices of valiant rebels who riot against readily-received ideas and paralyzing traditions. According to Richard Weisberg, in his article titled "Antonio's Legalistic Cruelty: Interdisciplinarity and 'The Merchant of Venice':"

Portia is, perhaps fascinated by Shylock's excessive yet somehow solid insistence on his bond, committed to undoing the moneylender's extreme application of what might otherwise be a righteous and ethical reliance on written law. But she is equally repulsed by the overly flexible oathbreaking of the Christian characters.<sup>7</sup>

Portia finds, between the extremes of the strict application of the law and unconditional mercy, the advantages of "cruel mercy." She knows that both Shylock's distempered voluntary causation of suffering<sup>8</sup> and the equally noxious abuse "of the right to punish"<sup>9</sup> hang together. The Duke fails to neutralize Shylock's intransigence by giving the Jew back his life and instead fines him, confiscates half his property and gives it to Antonio. According to the "Alien Statute" in Venice at the time, the state had the right to take Shylock's life and to claim his property. Nothing in the law, however, stipulated a forced conversion to Christianity, one of three conditions demanded by Antonio. Our tendency to focus exclusively on mercy ignores the blatant cruelty in having such a statute in the first place. Moreover, Portia, and surprisingly Shylock himself, seem oblivious or inured to this diktat. Their silence is deafening.

Nevertheless, Weisberg's Portia grows weary of "Christian distortion of the law – where ostensible 'mercy' quickly is debased to forms of legalized cruelty unimaginable" to a Jew. Christian casual flouting of the law in Venice, along with Antonio's subtle overstepping of the Alien Statute, adds a distinctive poignancy to the often-cited "Hath not a Jew eyes?" passage in Act 3:

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hand, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons... If you prick us, do we not bleed? .... And if you wrong

us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.... The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.”

Antonio and his friends, who have in the past abused Shylock and, likely, his kin, may remind us of what Pope Benedict XVI recently said of the victims who were sexually abused by Roman Catholic clergy. The New York Times quotes the Pope: “Indeed the victims of hardship and despair, whose human dignity is violated with impunity, become easy prey to the call to violence, and they can then become violators of peace.”<sup>10</sup> Although the contexts are admittedly very different, the emphasis of this essay is on the similarity between Shylock as a socially abused Jew and the persons sexually abused as victims likely to become, in turn, social or sexual predators.

Responding to Shylock’s refusal to be merciful, Portia becomes her most eloquent in her memorable speech:

The quality of mercy is not strained.  
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
 Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
 ‘Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
 The throned monarch better than his crown.  
 His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
 The attribute to God himself;  
 And earthly power doeth then show likest God’s  
 When mercy seasons justice.

Having effectively argued her case, Portia leaves Venice to return to Belmont. Once the dissimulating lover-lawyer, she now is the rich heiress of the enchanted, idyllic Belmont.

In her dealings with both the Christians and the Jew in court, and later in Belmont at the play’s end, Portia is obviously disgruntled with trite definitions of love, mercy, and justice. Hoping to have left behind one legal ritualistic sacrifice, she must now face another rite: the hyperbolic oath-swearing between Antonio and Bassanio. The first thing Bassanio says to Portia when he sees her is: “Give welcome to my friend, / This is the Man, this is Antonio/ To whom I am so infinitely bound” . Portia knows well who he is, having rescued him from his bond with Shylock. Still, she must now deal with this most interfering and tiresome of men. Antonio, the ubiquitous meddler, ever too

quick to provide “surety” for Bassanio’s hasty promises of love and fidelity, is hardly a corrective for an irresolute Bassanio. Portia confronts him with the plain and honest fact of his inconstancy: “If you had known the virtue of the ring, / Of half her worthiness that gave the ring, / Or your own honor to contain the ring, / You would not then have parted with the ring.” Bassanio’s ears must be ringing – each line ends with a “ring”! He is not the only one reminded of the preciousness of “bonding.” Gratiano, the blowhard, must also heed her stern reminder: “You were to blame – I must be plain with you – / To part so slightly with your wife’s first gift, / A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger, / And so riveted with faith unto your flesh.” A thing “so riveted” in flesh is bound to hurt if kept and hurt if broken: a thing of cruel mercy – an unkind kindness – an oxymoronic paradox.

An older, more magnanimous Justice John Paul Stevens, in his recent opinion regarding the use of lethal injection, argues that though experience has taught him otherwise, “the imposition of the death penalty represents ‘the pointless and needless extinction of life with only marginal contributions to any discernible social or public purposes. A penalty with such negligible returns to the State [is] patently excessive and cruel and unusual punishment violative of the Eight Amendment.’” Although he once sided with the majority in voting on the death penalty in 1976 as a new Supreme Court Justice, he now finds reason to reverse his opinion. More than 30 years later, Justice Stevens finds that he is “bound” to agree with the majority, but also “bound” to the “voices” that call for an end to the death penalty. Like Justice Stevens, a more experienced Portia in Belmont understands that even in Belmont “cruel mercy” is kind. She becomes the voice of human solidarity at the instant she challenges the traditions of exclusivity subtly ritualized in Venice’s court of justice. Shakespeare, Machiavelli, Seneca, and Montaigne recognize that the complex messiness of forging human relationships that are based on an intended merciful fairness that in the end is liable to conceal cruelty. These writers teach us about the dark side of mercy.

I would like to conclude with another Nasrudin story. This one is called “The Reason.” Nasrudin was looking to borrow some money from a rich man. When the man asked why, Nasrudin answered, “To buy an elephant.” The rich man said: “if you need a loan, then you can’t afford an elephant.” To which Nasrudin replied: “I came to get money, not advice.”<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A Nasrudin story (originator Idries Shah) as told to me by Dr. James Hersh, Philosophy Dept. Salve Regina University, on 4/18/08).

<sup>2</sup> Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*. Everyman Library, ed. Ernest Rhys with introduction by W.K. Marriott (London: Temple Press, 1938), ch. 17, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolo, *The Prince*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Lucius Seneca, "On Clemency," in *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca*, trans. Moses Hada (NY: Doubleday, 1958), p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. A Longman Cultural Edition, ed. Lawrence Danson (NY: Pearson/Longman, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, Book II, "On Cruelty". (NY: Penguin, 1958), p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> Weisberg, Richard H. "Antonio's Legalistic Cruelty: Interdisciplinarity and 'The Merchant of Venice'", *College Literature*, Winter 1998, Vol. 25, Issue 1, n.p. Academic Search Premier. EBSCHO. 31 March 2008 <http://library.salve.edu/> .

<sup>8</sup> Barrozo, Paulo D., "Punishing Cruelly: Punishment, Cruelty, and Mercy." (original paper Harvard Law School Paper No. 08-04) *Criminal Law and Philosophy in Business and Science Media B.V. Social Science Research Network eLibray*: 2007: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1005550>, n.p. 31 March 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

<sup>10</sup> Fisher, Ian and Warren Hoge, " In U.N. Address, Pope Stresses Importance of Defending Human Rights", *The New York Times*, Saturday, eastern ed., April 19, 2008, p. A17.

<sup>11</sup> Shah, Indries, *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin*, (NY: Penguin, 1968), p. 13.

**MERCY AND HUMAN SECURITY:  
EMERGING VALUES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in September 1815, in Paris, the monarchs of Austria, Prussia, and Russia signed the Holy Alliance. As a standard for regulating the relations between the sovereignties, the Alliance would provide “the precepts of the Holy Religion, namely the precepts of Justice, Christian Charity, and Peace, which, far from being applicable only to private concerns, must have an immediate influence on the councils of Princes, and guide all their steps...”<sup>1</sup> The treaty noted that “Conformably to the words of the Holy Scriptures, which, command all men to consider each other as brethren, the Three contracting Monarchs will remain united by the bonds of a true and indissoluble fraternity, and considering each other as fellow countrymen, they will, on all occasions and in places, lend each other aid and assistance.”<sup>2</sup> Although it was signed by nearly all European sovereignties, Lord Castlereagh, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, described it as a “piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense.”<sup>3</sup> Subsequently in 1876, when Ottoman irregular forces smashed through Bulgaria razing entire villages to the ground and killing “between 12,000 and 30,000 Bulgarians,”<sup>4</sup> British Prime Minister Disraeli, revoking considerations for maintaining the balance of power in Europe, decided against intervening on behalf of the Bulgarian peasants. Trying to change the balance of power in its favor, Russia did intervene. What really prevailed was not the concern for saving human lives but the concern to promote the interest of the state to the detriment of human lives. This attitude generally prevailed among statesmen in Europe until 1951, when France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries signed the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). By 1992, the EC became the European Union and according to its Web pages it “stands for a view of humanity and a model of society that the great majority of its citizens support. Europeans cherish their rich heritage of values, which includes a belief in human rights, social solidarity, free enterprise, a fair distribution of the fruits of economic

growth, the right to a protected environment, respect for cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and a harmonious blend of tradition and progress.”<sup>5</sup> The EU is working to create a borderless entity and Bulgaria is one of its members. In a sense, the European Union can be considered the realization of the human aspirations of an Alliance which was once referred to as “nonsense.”

Aside from being reflected in the realities of the European Union, the concept of the Holy Alliance is also being reflected in such international institutions as the United Nations. Yet in 1994 in Rwanda, some 50,000 extremists went on a killing spree, murdering in cold blood some 800,000 Rwandans in a mere one hundred days. No help was given to the victims, apparently because it was not in the interest of states to intervene. Yet, four years later, some 105 states signed the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which went into effect in January 2002. It notes that “few topics are of greater importance than the fight against impunity and the struggle for peace and justice and human rights in conflict situations in today’s world.”<sup>6</sup>

Based on the analysis so far, two points can be made. What seemed ridiculous in Europe in the early stages of the state system and what used to be the laughing stock of the statesmen at the time has now become a reality in the context of the European Union. For the rest of the world, however, certain concepts seem to be in the infancy of their practical application. Yet a moral start is always a good thing. This paper considers the concept of Mercy and Human Security as such a moral good start.

This paper will look at the recent development of the concept of human security, and go a step further by infusing in it the concept of mercy in an attempt to demonstrate its universal applicability. The concept of mercy has a rich tradition in all established faiths and cultures of the world, and can serve as a foundation for the concept of human security. A link that connects human security with mercy will attach an obligatory value to the acceptance and practical application of the concept of human security and make it more prevalent in the study of international relations. It can reinforce its strength and reduce resistance to viewing it as a “piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense.” Consistent with testimonies regarding the Holy Alliance above, international relations theory has been primarily concerned with national security as exemplified by the notion of state interest. The primary example of state interest has been considered to be

state survival, which dictates that statesmen are obligated to undertake any action (even immoral) deemed necessary to safeguard the national interest. The President of the United States, for example, swears to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.” The defense of the constitution is clearly delineated by legal principles, but the moral parameters of what is permissible action in defense of the Constitution is determined by state interest. In this context, the altruistic behavior of statesmen has often been considered detrimental to the state.

There is a widespread assumption among political figures, authors, and activists in international relations that the end of the Cold War has caused a landmark change in the relations between states. This paper argues that far from being a cause for change, the end of the Cold War was in itself an effect of attitudinal changes, which can be primarily attributed to three general developments that reached a sufficiently critical mass to change attitudes in general: the first of these is the maturity of the state system in Europe. The second is the fear of nuclear weapons worldwide. And the third is the rapid acceleration of global communications. Taken together, these three factors exposed the artificiality of state borders as human creations rather than natural landmarks. In this context, it is only a matter of time before the realization that all states are artificial constructs will become a universal perception. It is in this context, then, that the concept of human security has emerged. The first major document to make explicit reference to it is the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report of 1994: *New Dimensions of Human Security*.<sup>7</sup> It states that “Human security is a universal concern,” and that “it is relevant to people everywhere, in rich states and in poor states.” The report notes that human security “can be said to have two main aspects: It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease, and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life.”<sup>8</sup>

Although the UNDP argues that human security is a universal concern there is no consensus on what it means and there is disagreement on how to practice it. The same applies to a plethora of definitions that have emerged since 1994. Explicit in all of them is the notion that human security is about survival, livelihood, and individual integrity. At first glance, all three of these terms seem to be conventional aspirations of all people, but in order to comprehend their practical meaning, their universal

validity, and their precise relation to human security, it is necessary to reduce them to their bare essence. Reduction to their essential meaning should strip them from particular perceptions conditioned by specific geographic and historical circumstances and expose them to the scrutiny of universalism. For example, the meaning of livelihood and integrity can be perceived differently by people living in different economic environments while the meaning of survival can have a variety of dimensions attached to it based on how one conceptualizes reality and human existence.

Since there is no controversy about what a human being is, at least not any that can be considered scientifically credible, any universal definition of human security must focus on the word security and the common denominator by which each person on the planet relates to it consciously or otherwise. Etymologically, security is caring for one's own existence and needs. In this context, an infant depends on others to care for her or his existence and needs. But what does existence mean to people in general? Definite indications that a human being has become or is becoming aware of his or her physical existence is to be able to recognize one's reflection in a mirror or in still water, as Bambi did in the animated classic film of the same title. The realization of one's physical existence inevitably and unavoidably leads to the realization of the terminal limitations of all physical existence: that is death. Subsequently every human language has a word about being born, a word about being alive, and a word about dying. Subsequently all human beings come to wrestle with the question of where life comes from and where it leads. In this context every human being conceptualizes existence as physical and as spiritual or metaphysical (post-physical). Caring for one's existence then means two things: taking care of one's own physical existence, i.e., by satisfying the body's primary needs, and also taking care of one's own metaphysical needs or caring for one's own spiritual integrity.

Clearly, in at least the early stages of physical existence, humans depend exclusively on others to care for them, primarily for their physical existence. Child psychologists testify that the dependence of an infant on his/her care-giver (most likely the mother) is so great that it is actually perceived as a physical attachment (a quite logical assumption since a child's physical existence does begin as an extension of the mother's physical existence). Subsequently, dependence denotes the reality that one's physical existence is not possible without the caring qualities of another person's

physical existence. It should also be pointed out that in addition to the physical dependence indicated here, there is also an indirect dependence with the physical existences that the caretaker relies upon for his/her physical existence. As the child develops physically, she/he gradually becomes less dependent on the care giver until physical dependence eventually gives way to reliance in the same way that the care giver relied on others. The difference between dependence and reliance is that dependence denotes an immediate or urgent concern for physical existence while reliance denotes that physical existence is relatively assured in the short run. Where dependence is a condition corresponding to the primary needs of physical existence, reliance corresponds to the secondary needs of physical existence. Thus while the caretaker or the physical security provider (the mother in the example above) can potentially become a dependent himself or herself, they rely themselves for their physical existence on others. Dependence then means that one cannot take care of one's own primary needs, while reliance means that one's physical security is relatively assured and that the person can rely on others to satisfy secondary needs. This means that for the duration of physical existence one can never be independent or self-reliant. Indeed the dependence/reliance condition is the building block of all human associations which are manifestations of the value humans attach to physical existence. Without the human propensity to be security providers and without the human need to depend on others for security, physical existence is not possible.

Awareness of one's physical existence is unavoidably followed by the awareness that physical existence is finite and therefore terminal. Physical existence sooner or later is replaced by metaphysical existence, whether it is a conscious condition or not. One of the reasons why humans value physical existence is because of the unpredictability associated with metaphysical existence. At this point of the understanding of cosmology, humans understand neither the origins of life, nor its purpose; metaphysical existence remains a great unknown. The lack of knowledge about physical existence provides the incentive for people to rely on belief. Belief about physical existence is the unavoidable consequence of the realization of physical existence. Whereas humans depend/rely on others for physical existence, they depend/rely on belief for their metaphysical existence. All beliefs about metaphysical existence come under two categories: conscious and unconscious. Inevitably both conditions are perceived to be indefinite.

Also the fact that humans depend/rely on belief in relation to their concerns about metaphysical security is a universal reality that binds humans together. Just as all humans are connected through the experience of being born and being concerned for physical security, humans are also bound by the inevitable experience of dying. Thus depending/relying for their physical experience on others and being concerned for their metaphysical existence are common concerns that bind humans together.

Most fundamentally, since every individual depends and relies on others for physical existence, this relationship is directly related to the termination of physical existence and by extension to metaphysical existence. For example, the abrupt termination, for whatever reason, of reliance and dependence will unavoidably lead to death and metaphysical existence. To consciously terminate the dependence and reliance of a specific person is the same as affecting the end of that person's physical existence and initiating the same person's metaphysical existence. To avoid taking actions that might terminate a person's physical existence also affects the timing of a person's passing to metaphysical existence, while taking actions that sustain a specific person's physical existence until no longer possible is also affecting the experience of a person's passing into the condition of metaphysical existence. Either way, human action is entrancingly connected with the experiences that are common to humans. The connection can be either direct or indirect, but is always present. An example of a direct connection is the case of a person terminating or maintaining physical existence, while examples of indirect connection is the inventing or manufacturing/creating the instruments/conditions deployed in terminating or maintaining physical existence. Since all behavior is taking place in the context of associations produced by the human condition of dependence and reliance, all the members of the association are connected to all behavior taking place in the association. Also, since no association exists in isolation, then activity in any given association affects members of all other associations. All behavior impacts the dependence/reliance condition of all humans. This means that humans not only are connected by the experiences named above, but also with all the activity that impacts the universal experiences named above. As a result of the dependence/reliance condition, all humans are directly or indirectly connected to each other. The complete quality of the dependence/reliance condition makes up the entire world. In addition, since all human behavior

impacts the passing of humans from physical to metaphysical existence, current physical existence relates to all the future physical existence and to all metaphysical existence, both present and future. The awareness of this reality obligates people to be mindful of all of other peoples' existence and needs, causing people to demand that others be aware of their existence and needs.

Being mindful of other peoples' existence leads us to a definition of mercy. Fundamentally, the concept of mercy means to be concerned about all other peoples' concerns. This way, mercy is the link between all peoples' concerns related to their physical and metaphysical existence and the needs whose safeguarding leads to the safeguarding of all existence. Caring also presupposes not just being concerned for all peoples' existence but also becoming positively involved in caring for all peoples' existence and for existence in general. There are three characteristics of such concern: First, concern has to be based on sympathy, meaning that one places oneself in the position of others, especially in cases of physical or metaphysical security. Second, concern means that one has to become a shareholder in all other peoples' concerns. Becoming a shareholder means realizing that one has a vested interest in other peoples' concerns. Investing in existence in general is the foundation of all investments because there is no higher goal than that of existence. Finally, concern means empathy, which dictates that one has to balance all concerns including one's own and then prioritize them accordingly. Like the medical doctor who must care first for the neediest, empathy dictates that one should care for the primacy concerns before becoming concerned for secondary concerns. All primary concerns related to both physical and metaphysical security must be prior to secondary concerns related to the same. Not affecting negatively the existence of others, but especially not affecting the termination of physical existence directly or indirectly, comes before being concerned for needs and wants in general.

To relate the analysis back to the state and the way it is perceived in international relations, it is clear the human security and mercy dictate that states should be looked upon not as ends, but as a means to caring for all human concerns. Accordingly, the interest of the state should be dictated by a careful balance of all human concerns and by concerns for existence in general. Conceptualizing state interest in an unconcerned manner is hypocritical. Conceptualizing state interest in a partial manner, where some

primary concerns are recognized but not others, is contradictory and counterproductive. Physical and metaphysical existence requires that we neither pretend to live in artificially unconcerned vacuums nor that we claim to be caring or merciful when in fact we evade such practices.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rene Albrecht-Carrie, *The Concert of Europe: 1815-1914* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Gilden, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Europa, "Why the European Union"

([http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson\\_1/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson_1/index_en.htm)) Accessed on July 22, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court ([http://www.icc-cpi.int/library/about/-officialjournal/Rome\\_Statute\\_English.pdf](http://www.icc-cpi.int/library/about/-officialjournal/Rome_Statute_English.pdf)) Accessed on May 13, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP Human Development Report 1994: *New Dimensions of Human Security* (New York: United Nations, 1994) <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/> Accessed May 13, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

THE RHETORIC OF MERCY: DO-GOODERS,  
CORPORATISTS, AND WARRIORS

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On this celebration honoring the sixtieth anniversary of Salve Regina University – an institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy – I find it instructive to examine the rhetoric of mercy employed by our political leaders. The concept of “mercy” is often absent among the rough and tumble of electoral politics (we need only to look at the current U.S. presidential race for examples). Nevertheless, mercy has long been an important – if not always practiced – aspect of political leadership. The ancient Roman playwright and philosopher Seneca instructed his young emperor Nero, “It is impossible to imagine anything which better becomes a ruler than mercy.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for Rome, as well as a number of the emperor’s family members and the early Christians, Nero did not heed the sage counsel of his tutor. President Abraham Lincoln, speaking after nearly four years of brutal civil war, told a Washington, D.C., audience shortly before his untimely death, “I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, if we are to believe Lincoln – that the application of mercy is a superior approach to leadership – why do so many leaders, like Nero, neglect the virtue of mercy?

Catherine Elizabeth McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in 1831 specifically to serve the poor of Dublin. Within decades her ministerial outreach spanned the globe, including much of urban America (in cities like Providence, for example). By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sisters of Mercy operated schools, Catholic hospitals, and social service ministries throughout the United States. By 1910, about 4,700 Sisters of Mercy taught more than 100,000 students in parochial grade schools, as well as nearly 10,000 pupils in Mercy academies and high schools. In addition, the Sisters operated fifty-three hospitals and sixty-seven orphanages throughout the nation.<sup>3</sup> Mother McAuley and her religious sisters best expressed their vision of mercy through direct action: feeding the hungry, educating the ignorant, comforting the sick and dying. Rhetoric, for them,

was less important; or, expressed colloquially, “talk is cheap.”

While talk certainly can be cheap (and cheapened further by lack of actions backing it), rhetoric is still an important aspect of leadership, especially political leadership. This brief paper will explore the rhetoric of mercy used by U.S. presidents during three periods of significant social reform in the twentieth century: the Progressive era, the New Deal, and the Great Society. Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson led their respective campaigns during the 1910s, 1930s, and 1960s to ameliorate suffering and conditions of poverty among millions of American citizens. I use the terms “Do-Gooders,” “Corporatists,” and “Warriors” to describe (in a shorthand way) distinct attitudes toward social reform during the three periods. A consideration of these attitudes from our relatively recent national history, I hope, will allow us to consider strategies for engaging political solutions to problems of poverty and injustice now facing us in the early twenty-first century. Finally, I will end the paper by briefly examining the rhetoric of mercy found within the speechmaking of a few of our contemporary national leaders.

#### PROGRESSIVISM

In his first inaugural address, Woodrow Wilson declared that the nation had arrived at a “new age of right and opportunity...where justice and mercy are reconciled.” Why such profound optimism? Progressive reformers, like Wilson, held a steadfast belief in the improvement, if not outright perfectibility, of human society. Applying the growing body of scientific and social scientific knowledge to the body politic, Progressives (or “Do-Gooders” as I call them) championed legislation meant to protect citizens from such social evils as child labor, impure food, and alcohol consumption. I refer to them as “Do-Gooders,” because, at times, Progressives worked to “protect” Americans from that which many did not believe they needed protection (e.g., witness the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment initiating Prohibition in the United States in 1919 followed fourteen years later by the Twenty-First Amendment, which repealed it in 1933). Progressives, like social work pioneer Jane Addams and environmental conservationist Gifford Pinchot, embraced the principles of moderation, order, and morality. As members of the nation’s growing middle class, they sought to impose their middle-class sensibilities on an American society scarred by the sometimes violent conflicts arising from acute class divisions

that resulted from the yawning gap between the unbelievable wealth and crippling poverty of the industrial age.

Historians have argued that the Progressive movement was an attempt to remake American politics and economics in the image of the middle-class, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant home of the Victorian Age. Within this feminized, domestic sphere, wives and mothers safeguarded the moral wellbeing of the family. Such women instructed their children in religious faith, taught manners, and modeled respectable behavior. Outside the home, however, in the public sphere, it was understood that men – even good, middle-class men – often needed to act in aggressive, ruthless, and even downright un-Christian ways to succeed in the race for the “survival of the fittest” within the realms of business and politics. Progressivism sought to extend the so-called “Cult of Domesticity” to the public sphere in order to make society more like middle-class family parlors imbued with order and morality. The Social Gospel Movement of mainline Protestantism guided this Progressive thinking. Organized religion had long emphasized the great reward found in the afterlife, but these Christian reformers took seriously the Gospel message to build the kingdom of God on Earth. After World War I, President Wilson went so far as to attempt to impose this middle-class Progressive model on the rest of the world in the form of the League of Nations. In his famous “Fourteen Points” speech to the U.S. Congress, Wilson called for a world governed by “covenants of justice and law and fair dealing,” because “an evident principle ... is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak.” This Wilsonian internationalism called for a “New World Order” to make the world “safe for democracy.”

Progressives did make remarkable strides in improving our society. I think we all can agree that the Food and Drug Administration and National Parks improved quality of life (although this time of year we might not be such fans of the Progressive’s Sixteenth Amendment which in 1913 created the federal income tax). Yet the do-gooder, top-down approach to mercy also left room for myopic self-righteousness. Woodrow Wilson, a southerner, Ph.D. in history and political science, former university president, and Progressive, was also a white supremacist, who, upon entering the White House, ordered the segregation, and – in some cases, wholesale rejection – of African American civil servants in the executive branch, nearly

fifty years after passage of the Fourteenth Amendment had guaranteed citizenship to African Americans.<sup>4</sup> Jane Addams, in her work in the slums of Chicago, expressed condescension and disdain for the religious and cultural practices of the Italian immigrants she encountered, pledging to “Americanize” them, because festivals venerating the Madonna did not fit within the Progressives’ vision of America.<sup>5</sup> The Progressive policy of prohibition, moreover, was just as much an attack on Roman Catholic immigrants, who were preserving the drinking cultures of their homelands, as it was on alcohol use itself.

Father James Keenan of Boston College, who spoke in this hall last October, defines mercy as “the willingness to enter into the chaos of others.”<sup>6</sup> Progressive reformers like Addams did enter into the chaos of others for the purpose of transforming the poor and the immigrant, but seldom did they leave themselves open to the possibility of being transformed by those they sought to help. When we look at examples of this top-down approach to reform at the local, national, and international levels, we find that justice achieved in this way, if achieved at all, most often is untenable. History shows us that true mercy and lasting justice requires humility from all parties. But the Progressive understanding of mercy most often favored zeal and pity over sensitivity and humility.

#### THE NEW DEAL

Nothing quite humbled the nation as much as the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Unemployment rates at 25 percent (as high as 80 percent in some cities), homelessness, hunger, and despair gripped millions. An urban coalition of working-class, white ethnic Catholics, along with African Americans and Jews, helped put Franklin Delano Roosevelt in office in a 1932 landslide. Faced with the apparent failure of *laissez-faire* capitalism, Roosevelt embraced social corporatism, a philosophy which emphasized protection of groups over individuals. Corporatism was an idea dating back to the guilds of medieval Europe endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout his time in elected office, the Protestant Roosevelt actively courted Catholic support, working closely with big city Irish Catholic political machines and appointing a Catholic to his cabinet, as well as to the U.S. Supreme Court. A confidant of Cardinal George Mundelein of Chicago, FDR felt at home among American Catholics and adopted the

language of Catholic social teachings as interpreted by Monsignor John Ryan of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, who lobbied tirelessly for minimum wage legislation. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin's Catholic Worker Movement arose from the same social Catholic teachings championed by Ryan and grounded in two influential papal encyclicals – *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) – calling on Catholics to work for social justice, especially for laborers in industrialized societies.

It was within this context that President Roosevelt urged Americans to set themselves “resolutely to the performance of those spiritual and corporal acts of mercy which have ever been the salvation of men and Nations.”<sup>7</sup> If America were to survive the Depression, her people must work together. A spirit of solidarity and community needed to supplant the competition and individualism of the Roaring Twenties. Through his intimate “Fireside Chats,” Roosevelt used the modern technology of radio to comfort everyday Americans who often felt helpless amid economic insecurity. Despite his elite pedigree, FDR entered into the chaos of others without condescending. Some historians argue that his battle with polio greater sensitized Roosevelt to the suffering of others. New Deal government policies, such as the Works Progress Administration, Social Security, and the newly established federal minimum wage, emphasized communal responsibility. Roosevelt's language went so far as to endorse what Catholic social teaching today calls the “preferential option for the poor.” In his second inaugural address, Roosevelt told his countrymen, “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

The New Deal began the creation of the modern welfare state in the United States. In concert with the Catholic notion of communion, this new approach to government meant to create a social safety net for the elderly, the sick, and the downtrodden. Today, Social Security is considered the “third rail” of American politics, an untouchable entitlement. Rejecting Social Darwinism, social corporatists believed mercy meant including each member of society under its protective umbrella. The New Deal's comprehensiveness resulted not only from a philosophical commitment to corporatism but also from the reality that the Depression affected almost every segment of American society. Class antagonisms between the seemingly unaffected wealthy and the rest of society did exhibit themselves

in the 1930s, but, for the most part, Americans found themselves together in the proverbial same boat. The white-collar, middle-class reformers left over from the Progressive era were not now in a position to objectify the poor as “other,” since severe economic hardship was no longer an aberration assigned only to immigrants and the chronically poor. Out of the New Deal developed a liberal national consensus committed to protecting Americans from the sting of poverty through government action, which shaped public policy for more than twenty-five years following World War II.

#### THE GREAT SOCIETY

The unprecedented economic boom in the postwar United States led to a standard of living among Americans commonly described as the highest in human history. As the middle class rapidly expanded and homeownership dramatically increased, conventional wisdom held that the American Dream was within reach of every citizen. This aggregate economic prowess provided a bulwark for the United States in the Cold War, as the stunning scope of middle-class consumerism became ipso facto an argument against Soviet communism. The 1962 publication, therefore, of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* garnered much national attention. The book focused on the rural poor, African American poor, and aged poor hidden in plain view. Harrington described the conditions of those living in persistent poverty, which he calculated to be between 40 and 50 million Americans, nearly one quarter of the U.S. population. Many commentators wondered out loud, “How could such poverty exist amid such wealth?” And more than a few worried that the Soviet Union could exploit this weakness.

Born into poverty in the hill country outside of Austin, Texas, Lyndon Johnson did not enjoy the early-life privileges of the middle-class Wilson or well-to-do Roosevelt. A political product of the New Deal Democratic coalition, LBJ possessed an almost unlimited faith in the American government’s power to make life better for its people, as well as people around the world. As president, Johnson became what I call a “(Cold) Warrior” against poverty. “[I]n your time,” he told the University of Michigan’s 1964 graduating class, “we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society.”<sup>8</sup> Johnson’s Great Society became the sequel to Roosevelt’s New Deal and Harry Truman’s Fair Deal, an attempt to employ the resources

and authority of the federal government to alleviate suffering and provide opportunity. Johnson's War on Poverty included the establishment of healthcare for the elderly (Medicare) and poor (Medicaid), as well as federally sponsored preschool (Head Start). The (Cold) Warriors against poverty were motivated by both nationalism and ethical principles. On one hand, how could a nation hoping to defeat communism allow one-fourth of its population to live in poverty? On the other hand, how could a just people enjoy unprecedented affluence, while so many fellow citizens suffered from chronic deprivation?

Like the Progressives, the (Cold) Warriors against poverty approached their task with a certain missionary zeal. Volunteer programs, like the Peace Corps and VISTA, tapped into progressive idealism. Yet, these Warrior reformers were more likely to allow the chaos they encountered to transform them. They became more interested in, and respectful of, the folk traditions of workers, the rural poor, and racial minorities. Even so, top-down control still beleaguered the War on Poverty, and in 1974 Congress created the Community Development Block Grant, which allowed state and local governments, closer to the ground, to distribute funds for anti-poverty programs. Like the New Dealers, the Warriors emphasized corporate – or group – rights. The modern American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s demanded recognition of African Americans' Constitutional rights, while parallel movements – the women's, Chicano, American Indian, and Gay and Lesbian movements – redefined legal and political approaches to civil rights in the United States. The effort to protect historically subjugated groups developed a greater focus on group rights, which shared some similarities with New Deal corporatism. In 1964 and 1965, Johnson signed the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts, respectively, honoring at last the federal government's commitment to Reconstruction begun, and then abandoned, a century earlier.

Faced with stark discrepancies between great abundance and great need within American society, the Warriors refused to believe that the challenge to end poverty was beyond the nation's reach. Massive spending on the war in Vietnam, civil unrest in the streets of American cities, and a growing critique of the modern welfare state combined, however, to work against Johnson's ambitious campaign. At the same time, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) called on Roman Catholics to be merciful toward the poor. "[E]xcessive economic and social differences between the members of

the one human family or population groups,” wrote Pope Paul VI, “cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Church began acknowledging the sin of racism. Meanwhile, the inability to fight wars on two fronts – in Vietnam and against poverty – ultimately destroyed Lyndon Johnson politically; but as he lit the nation’s Christmas tree in 1963 only a month into his presidency, LBJ concluded that “mercy and compassion are the really enduring values.”<sup>10</sup> For without them, all the government programs in the world would not achieve true justice.

#### MERCY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As spending on social welfare programs accelerated and U.S. troop levels in Vietnam neared the 400,000 mark, a backlash against Johnson’s two wars dramatically altered the midterm elections of 1966. Former vice president Richard Nixon stumped for candidates around the country that autumn, helping to rebuild the Republican Party’s voter base and begin his own political comeback. Ronald Reagan became governor of California, and George H. W. Bush was elected to his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives from Houston’s Seventh Congressional District. This year 1966, then, marked the political origins of four presidencies spanning twenty-six years between 1969 and 2009. The foundations were laid for what would become the dominant political ideology for the last quarter of the twentieth century. A profound distrust of the welfare state and increasing focus on privatization and individualism replaced the faith – held by Progressives, New Dealers, and Great Society warriors, alike – that government activism could affect genuine social reform.

Despite this movement to the right, the social welfare state, did not, of course, dissolve, as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid still serve millions of Americans. Today, some politicians look for new ways to invoke mercy. Former North Carolina Senator and presidential candidate John Edwards speaks of “Two Americas,” one rich and one poor. “Poverty,” Edwards argues, “is the great moral issue of our time.”<sup>11</sup> In his 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush championed “compassionate conservatism” and “faith-based initiatives,” and in 2003 announced the President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR), which he called “a work of mercy beyond all current international efforts to help the people of

Africa.”<sup>12</sup> More recently, U.S. Senator from Illinois and presidential candidate Barack Obama has invoked the words of Genesis 4:9. In his speech last month on racism in America Obama said, “Let us be our brother’s keeper... Let us be our sister’s keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.”<sup>13</sup>

As in the time of Seneca, the rhetoric – and actions – of mercy are often difficult to find among today’s leaders. Too often, compassion and mercy take on connotations of weakness and naiveté. The example, however, of Catherine McAuley – intrepid, resourceful, and resilient – provides us with a model of a merciful leader in this world who worked for lasting justice.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Essays*, Volume 1, *De Clementia*, “On Mercy” (ca. 55 A.D.).

<sup>2</sup> Quotation from 1865 attributed to Abraham Lincoln in Osborn H. Oldroyd, ed., *The Lincoln Memorial: Album-Immortelles* (Springfield, IL: Lincoln Publishing, 1890), 459.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Stanislas Austin, “Sisters of Mercy,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume X (New York, 1911). Internet: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10199a.htm>, Accessed April 18, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Blumenthal, “Woodrow Wilson and the Race Question,” *Journal of Negro History* 48.1 (January 1963): 5-9. See also David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reform and Reaction, 1900–1917* (Wheeling, WV: Harlan Davidson, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Jane Addams, “Religious Education and Contemporary Social Conditions,” *Journal of the Religious Education Association* vol. 6 (June 1911).

<sup>6</sup> For more on this definition, see James F. Keenan, SJ, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Greetings to Catholic War Veterans,” October 30, 1935. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, eds., *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted). Internet: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14969>, Accessed April 18, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Commencement address, Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 22, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican, 1965). Internet: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), Accessed April 20, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the Lighting of the Nation's Christmas Tree," December 22, 1963. Woolley and Peters. Internet: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26587>, Accessed April 18, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Policy address to the National Press Club, June 22, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> State of the Union speech, January 28, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> "A More Perfect Union," March 18, 2008.

**MERCIFUL PRACTICES OF A BUSINESS PROGRAM:  
LOOKING IN – REACHING OUT  
A CASE STUDY**

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*“While we place all our confidence in God, we must always act as if success depended on our own expectations.” – Catherine McAuley*

**INTRODUCTION**

Can business be merciful? This paper provides a case study of the Salve Regina University Business Studies & Economics Department and how it works to better integrate the University’s mercy mission. Six years ago, the Business Studies & Economics Department drafted and adopted a mission-integration statement – the first step in formally recognizing the department’s interest in integrating the University’s mission into departmental activities.

The mission integration statement – in part – seeks “...to maintain an inclusive environment that promotes sensitivity to cultural diversity, human rights, human needs, social justice, social responsibility and environmental stewardship...”

Since the adoption of the mission-integration statement, the department has worked to identify ways in which the members of the department – students, faculty, and staff – can embrace and implement the mercy mission. Many programs have taken shape over the last 6 years which have been successful in providing opportunities for all members of the department to participate in service-based programs, thus creating a mercy culture within the department.

This paper begins with a working definition of mercy, the Salve Regina University mission statement, and the Business Studies & Economics Department mission-integration statement. The focus on the remainder of the paper will be on opportunities and challenges of “taking action” by

providing numerous opportunities for department members to get involved and use their skills to help others in the mercy tradition.

#### DEFINING MERCY

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2008), mercy is defined as follows:

“1 a: compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power; also : lenient or compassionate treatment <begged for mercy> b: imprisonment rather than death imposed as penalty for first-degree murder 2 a: a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion b: a fortunate circumstance <it was a mercy they found her before she froze> 3: compassionate treatment of those in distress <works of mercy among the poor>”<sup>1</sup>

Defining mercy as compassion, as in “to show mercy,” limits the definition to only one aspect of mercy. To simply be able to identify an unjust situation is not necessarily to show mercy. Mercy requires an act – as in “an act of mercy.” For the purposes of this paper, and the Department of Business Studies & Economics, mercy is defined as including compassion and action – implying that without action, mercy has not occurred. Later in this paper, as the depth of the mercy experiences are discussed, we will see that often mercy as action produces a deeper, richer experience and understanding of the mercy mission.

#### SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement of Salve Regina University, a university founded by the Sisters of Mercy, is vital to understanding why operationalizing the mercy mission is so important to our department, and why we continue to educate our students about the importance of working for a “...world that is harmonious, just, and merciful.” By offering our students opportunities for practicing the mission with the skills they possess in their chosen field of work, we give them a chance to recognize the power and value of their skills, and the impact they can have in the community. The Salve Regina University mission statement follows:

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.<sup>2</sup>

#### TAKING ACTION

Part of the evolution of the Business Studies & Economics Department has included reflection on the “depth” of the mercy experience. Initially, mercy was equated with the recognition of business situations which were construed as unjust or unfair. These ethical situations and issues are relatively easy to identify in all of the business and economics majors – finance, accounting, management, administration, information systems, global economics, and marketing. An “ethics across the curriculum” approach was used to encourage faculty to work these ethical discussions into the various course content. Additionally, all business majors were (and still are) required to complete an Ethics for Business course as a core requirement. Initially, this was how the mercy mission was implemented in the department.

#### DEPTH OF MERCY EXPERIENCE



Thus, while the first step was “Recognizing Social Injustice,” the second step included the discussion of alternative solutions to these unjust situations. The solutions, however, were distant. “Does our industry recognize the social injustices, and how do they deal with them?” The analysis of alternative solutions gave students the ability to study organizations within the industry and how they overcome (or mitigate) these injustices. The goal, here, is to provide students with alternative solutions to these situations, so they may take them into the workforce after graduation. This problem-

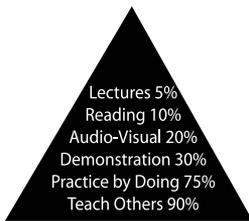
solution approach was a deeper mercy experience, as it implied that solutions are available, and that action is taken by some organizations.

The next natural progression took the form of developing a participative solution. “How can we make a difference now?” In this phase, the department recognized that “active experiences” during students’ college years implied that we, as a community, can take action and make a difference, and that we can help to overcome some of these unjust situations now. In addition, an important benefit to this step is that we can lead students to participate in solutions by practicing their business skills. This allows students to increase their retention of the material and improve their skills. Additionally, by orchestrating situations where the student works for a “real world” client – such as a non-profit organization – the student is able to add the experience to his/her resumé.

The active experiences provided by the Business & Economics Department are carefully crafted to encapsulate the mercy mission. For example, non-profit organizations that operate with lean staff and small budgets are often used as “clients” and paired with students who have the skills required to accomplish the tasks needed by the organization. We refer to these action-based experiences as service-learning – opportunities for students to practice discipline-specific skills while helping others in need. According to [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org), service-learning is “...a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.”<sup>3</sup> Integrating the Service Learning Program at Salve Regina University into the Business Studies & Economics Department accomplished those goals while acting as an important academic tool for learning.

The ability to integrate the academic learning, practical skills, and mercy mission has met with great success thus far. Clients have been appreciative of the assistance they have received; and students are eager to put their newly-learned skills to work. At the end of the experience, students are required to submit a reflection of their experience. The reflections emphasize not just the business skills developed, but also the application of mercy to their chosen profession. What we have found from a review of these reflections is that students practice more than their business skills in our service-learning programs. They practice mercy, kindness, patience, and compassion. What they learn goes beyond business theory, skills, and knowledge. It is more important than that.

Curricular focus in this program is on identifying and recognizing social injustices within the discipline of business (already discussed in many business texts in terms of ethics and social responsibility), discussing the issues related to the injustices and potential solutions (thus fostering decision-making skills, critical thinking, and compassion), and then giving the students the ability to create and implement their own solutions (thereby, taking action by utilizing the skills learned in class). The fundamentals of teaching remain intact – only issues related to the course or discipline are part of the curriculum.



*The Learning Pyramid*  
National Training Laboratories

The Learning Pyramid created by the National Training Laboratories (*left*) supports the theory – skills – practice ideal sought here. Learning is more than conceptualizing; it is also about practicing and developing those skills. “The pyramid stipulates the average retention rate of information based on various teaching methods... the most effective methods, those that ensure the highest retention rates, depend on active experience.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, on average, students retain 5% of what they hear in a lecture, 10% of what they read... 75% of what they practice by doing, and 90% of what they teach others. With this in mind, service-learning experiences related to business and economics are created.

Action-based service-learning programs currently used in the Business Studies & Economics Department include those offered in MGT212: Business Communications, MGT290: Human Resources Management, ISM304: Microsoft Certification, and MGT422: Marketing Strategies. Other courses plan to implement the service-learning option in the future. In addition, extracurricular service-learning opportunities are available through various academic clubs including the Accounting/Finance club with their Volunteers in Tax Assistance (VITA) program, the American Marketing Association, which has won numerous national awards for their service involvement, and more. These programs offer the students, faculty, and staff the ability to participate in programs that offer active experiences within the context of mercy, education, and skill development.

Examples of these programs include MGT290: Human Resources Management where students in the class are paired with local at-risk high school students to improve job preparedness, including the development of

resumés, practicing interviewing skills, and exploring different job opportunities upon graduation. Students in the ISM304: Microsoft Certification class work with lower-income adults who wish to learn various Microsoft applications to improve their job prospects. Some of these adults who become proficient in the Microsoft applications are passing the Certification exams. Students in MGT422: Marketing Strategies work with a non-profit client with little or no marketing staff or budget. The students work to create a marketing plan to achieve the client's goals, and may also implement some of the programs for the client.

#### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Opportunities provided by the action-based programs discussed above include providing students with the ability to practice what they have learned, increasing retention of the concepts, providing students with activities that will enhance their résumé, and developing a culture of mercy to differentiate our business programs.

From an academic point of view, the most important opportunities come from enhanced learning. By practicing what they are learning and teaching others what they know, students are able to retain a higher percentage of what is learned. It also gives them the opportunity to put their knowledge and skills to work, moving beyond a conceptual viewpoint. The additional benefit of having the mercy culture embedded in learning provides an opportunity for students to “do good” and experience how valuable their skills are to others.

In the post-experience reflection, students have commented about expanding their knowledge, improving their communication skills, feelings of accomplishment, worth and importance as they help others, experiencing diverse cultures, and more. The following excerpts were taken from student reflections.

#### EXCERPTS FROM STUDENT REFLECTIONS

*“Service-learning was a valuable experience that made me realize how fulfilling helping others can be. Seeing these women succeed in something that they’ve worked for was very satisfying for me, and it’s great to know that I helped them to achieve something that is such an asset in their lives.”*

*“From a strictly academic standpoint the project as a whole was a great way to encompass and include all the areas of marketing that I have studied over the past four years. The exciting part was that we were doing some good. We were actually helping a real place that needed some assistance. We were not just doing some hypothetical assignment out of a textbook.”*

*“After the project was completed, I was surprised to find that I was taught something from the experience as well. My personal communication skills improved because I pushed myself to speak and relate to other students with whom I normally would not have the opportunity. Furthermore, the course refreshed some of the basics that I had forgotten.”*

*“Academics aside, I also learned a lot about culture and how to interact with someone who has seemingly much different interests than my own. The background of these kids and my own is completely different, from the households that we were raised in to the activities that we do in our free time. In the beginning I found it a little hard to relate and talk but once we both started to get more comfortable a couple sessions in it made everything a lot easier. I found that as much as we are different, we have a lot of important similarities as well. At a basic level, we were both looking to get the most out of life. We both have hopes and dreams for what we want to accomplish and we are both looking for the best ways to get there. I think that this experience will allow me to not be so shy in the future. I am not someone who would usually just go up and talk to someone new, but I think that this experience will really help me open up to new things.”*

By working with “real clients,” students are also able to note this experience on their resumés, and talk about the experience during the interviewing process. We see this as a value-added component of the program. In addition, we find from discussing this program with potential students and parents that it gives us a unique point of differentiation for our business program. Experiences are chosen that will enhance learning and celebrate the mercy culture; the added value of resumé enhancement and differentiation are bonuses to the students and department.

With any program come challenges. Challenges include managing “clients,” engaging students, integrating learning into action, and measuring success. We refer to “clients” as those who benefit from the activities of our students. Clients may be at-risk high school students, adults looking to enhance their employment skills, or non-profit organizations in need of marketing or management plans.

The challenges involved with managing clients include how to identify an appropriate client. A client must have a problem which fits into the learning outcomes of the class, fulfills the mercy mission, and is accessible as needed. Since the primary mission of the University is to educate, that goal cannot be lost in the implementation of the program. Once identified, there must be an orientation of clients and students in order to set the expectations of both groups. The client must understand that the learning process must be incorporated into the program, and that the program may take additional time due to the learning process. Managing client expectations (and setting them early in the process) is important. Students must also understand the purpose of the programs, and their role in them. Without commitment from both sides, there may be disappointment. Additionally, the client must understand that the instructor’s role is as a facilitator of the process. The client needs to understand that the instructor will not be completing the work, but will assist and advise students in completing the work.

Currently, our service-learning programs are voluntary and not all students or faculty members participate. This leads to the issue of engaging students. Students receive one credit for successfully completing a service-learning project. We have also found that students are motivated to participate based on recommendations from past participants, the need to enhance their résumés, and on community needs. The current generation of college students has already been exposed to numerous community service programs. Many middle schools and high schools require community service of their graduates. The heightened sensitivity of this generation to community needs also has been an impetus for their participation in service-learning.

The greatest academic challenge is in integrating the service program into the academic requirements of the course. This requires a great deal of flexibility to meet changing client needs while accomplishing course

objectives. Although sometimes difficult, it does give students a sense for what it is like to work for a “real” client in the “real” world.

Another challenge is measuring the success of the program. Currently, students are required to write a reflection about their experience. The reflections are not standardized, and do not specifically capture anything more than anecdotal data. Additionally, measuring the success of the program from the client side has not yet been implemented, and remains an area rich in further potential.

## CONCLUSIONS

As we continue to foster opportunities for a “mercy experience” in the Business Studies & Economics Department, we seek to expand the breadth and depth of the experience. Ideally, all students would have the opportunity at multiple points in their academic journey to opt for a service-learning experience specific to their major. We are fortunate to have a university-wide commitment to the program, and administration support and assistance as needed.

We understand that it is important to offer the service-learning experience as it not only contributes to the mercy culture of the institution, and more specifically to the department, but also enhances learning, retention, students’ skills, and résumés. Finding this “fit” is important to developing and continuing the program.

Working as a facilitator of the experience, the faculty member must be flexible and look for the “teachable moments” instead of staying rigid to specific skills or outcomes. Clients change their mind, and having a flexible program is important. For that reason, this may not work in all courses. Having clear expectations of faculty, students, and clients is important. Improving measurement of student and client experiences seems to be the next step.

As the program grows, additional funding will be necessary to improve the depth of the experience. The expenses related to the programs are currently coming from either the client (however, some non-profits we work with have little or no budget), from small grants the students are able to pursue, or from grants written by faculty in the program. Further grant-writing (or other financial means) to support larger projects will improve opportunities for clients and students alike.

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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."<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

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.”<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> 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 resúmes. 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup>

Another distinction of mercy spirituality is that it introduced a synthesis of contemplation and action<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup>

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. <sup>11</sup>

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."<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup>

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”.<sup>14</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Thoughts from the Spiritual Conferences of Mother M. Catherine McAuley (Dublin), 7

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 34:6-7

<sup>3</sup> John 3:16

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:9-16

<sup>5</sup> Richard Gula, SS, Reason Informed By Faith (Paulist Press), 7

<sup>6</sup> John 12:24

<sup>7</sup> Thoughts from the Spiritual Conferences of Mother M. Catherine McAuley (Dublin), 46

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 58

<sup>9</sup> M. Angela Bolster, RSM, Catherine McAuley Venerable for Mercy (Dominican Publications), 104

<sup>10</sup> Mary C. Sullivan, The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley (Four Courts Press), 77

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 332

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 333

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:11-12

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.



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