

Venerable Catherine McAuley and The Dignity of the Human Person

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Over a century before the principles of the “new evangelization” were proclaimed in 1965 in *Gaudium et spes* (*The Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World*) Catherine McAuley (1781–1841), vigorously promoted its two key principles: (1) the dignity of the human person and (2) the virtue of solidarity with the suffering poor, sick, and ignorant.¹ From her *First Conferences* after founding the Religious Sisters of Mercy in 1831 in Dublin, Ireland, Mother Catherine consistently taught her Sisters to put these principles into practice in their apostolic work in education and health care.²

Drawing upon Venerable Catherine McAuley’s original writings and biographies of her life and works, this article will demonstrate how she helped prepare the way for consecrated persons in the new evangelization of the Church in the modern world. The themes are divided as follows: Part I—The Dignity of the Human Person, Part II—Solidarity with the Poor, Sick, and Ignorant, and Part III—Urgent Problems for the Church in the Modern World.

I The Dignity of the Human Person

Gaudium et spes identifies two theological sources for the dignity of the human person: being created in the image and likeness of God (#12) and being redeemed by Jesus Christ, who fully reveals the dignity of our human nature to us because he assumed our human nature (#22).³ Section 17 of *Gaudium et spes* describes freedom as a sign of this human dignity:

But that which is truly freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in man. For God willed that man should “be left in the hand of his own counsel” (*Eccl.* 15;14) so that he might of his own accord seek his creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him. Man’s dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice...⁴

Calling forth the “noble destiny” of human beings, *Gaudium et spes* #3 states that “it is mankind that must be renewed...[with the human being] considered whole and entire, with body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will.” Human dignity is enhanced by fostering the integration of the passions towards spiritual goals in a unified personal life (#14), formation of the intellect towards the truth and objective moral standards (#15-16), and strengthening of the will towards good choices (#17).

When oppressive events, contexts, or situations in the world denigrate human dignity, a remedial response demands elevating the situation of woundedness and the removal of occasions for evil. Catherine McAuley's decision to build her large Home of Mercy on Baggot Street, a wealthy Protestant area of Dublin, was a strong action supporting religious freedom and flying in the face of the recently repealed penal laws which had so severely restricted worship and association of Catholics and had forbidden all inheritance of wealth and property belonging to Catholics.⁵ In the *Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae* #1 we find the Church articulating these same principles:

Contemporary man is becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person; more and more people are demanding that men should exercise fully their own judgment and a responsible freedom in their actions and should not be subject to the pressure of coercion but be inspired by a sense of duty. At the same time they are demanding constitutional limitation of the powers of government to prevent excessive restriction of the rightful freedom of individuals and associations. This demand for freedom in human society is concerned chiefly with man's spiritual values, and especially with what concerns the free practice of religion in society.

This implies the fostering of human dignity and educating others to set them free. *Gaudium et spes* #17 asserts: "Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself to all slavery to the passions, he presses forward towards his goal by freely choosing what is good, and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end."

In the new evangelization of the Second Vatican Council, the Church offers to enter into a partnership with human beings, to foster renewal, and to remove obstacles to renewal. The Church identifies her motivation in *Gaudium et spes* #3: "[It is] not earthly ambition, but is interested in one thing only—to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit...". Mother Catherine McAuley formed her Institute of the Religious Sisters of Mercy with the same motivation. She states clearly that works of the Institute must be done for Christ and not for earthly ambition. They must be done to serve Christ who is found in the poor, and done by Christ because all the good of one's actions should be attributed not to oneself but to God. Thus Mother Catherine instructed a purity of intention, the orientation of the service, and the practice of humility. To remind oneself of these values, Catherine McAuley suggests that each Sister visit the Blessed Sacrament both before and after she goes out to teach or to visit the sick. One of her Maxims also stated: "Our Divine Model, Jesus Christ, should be in regard of a Religious like a book continually open before her, from which she must learn what she is to think, say, and do—in what manner—at what time."⁶

Fostering Human Dignity in Religious Life

Catherine McAuley fostered the dignity of the human person in consecrated life, first through the formation of her Religious Sisters, and second in their apostolic work. In *The First Conferences of Mother Catherine McAuley* given to her companions immediately after her first profession of vows in 1831-32, we discover her inviting each Sister to grow in personal perfection: "The esteem of perfection, and of all spiritual things which conduce to it should make a deep impression on our hearts. We should encourage each other to it not merely by words and ordinary conversation, but much more by our actions and the general tenor of our lives."⁷ Striving for perfection was highlighted in the first sentence of Catherine McAuley's *Familiar Instructions*: "As the principle end of our Institute, according to our holy Rule, is to attend particularly to our perfection, we should never relax in our efforts to attain sanctity."⁸

Venerable Catherine fully recognized a deep desire of the heart as the crucial starting place for all movement towards the perfection of the human person: "The attainment of Christian perfection is not to be accomplished by constraint: It is the heart that must undertake it... the good of perfection is in our will, for if we have not an ardent sincere desire of becoming perfect all the care and instruction we could receive will avail little."⁹ For the Sister seeking to grow in the perfection of her personal dignity, this process of integration often demands ascetical forms of self-denial. Mother Catherine captured the dynamic aspect of this process by drawing an analogy from St. Gregory: "Those who lead a religious life, says he, are like persons in the midst of a rapid river. If they stop but a minute and do not strive continually to bear up against the stream they will run great risk of being carried away."¹⁰ Reflecting on a passage from Scripture she taught:

The kingdom of Heaven is to be taken by storm and the violent bear it away. We must constantly push forward offering violence to all our passions, honors, and inclinations. St. Thomas and St. Chrysostom say that religious life being a state in which we are bound to aspire to perfection, those who do not constantly keep this in view and strive every moment to become more perfect cannot be considered true religious since they neglect the only thing for which they should have embraced that state.¹¹

Catherine McAuley introduces several practical guidelines on ways her Religious Sisters ought to strive for perfection. The first is to focus on doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.¹² The second is to concentrate only on each particular day.¹³ The third is to practice a humble attitude towards oneself¹⁴ and toward one's own work in the Institute. A fourth is to identify the particular passion which is most likely to lead one to error or sin.¹⁵ A fifth is to study and to integrate what we learn.¹⁶ These guidelines orient the theoretical intellect towards the truth of religious life as well as on the truth about one's self. They orient the practical intellect and will to make small, repeated, practical choices

which develop habits supportive of the striving for perfection. They also dispose us towards rooting out habits which are obstacles for the full development of the human person in union and charity.

Mother Catherine entitled her second Treatise “Of the Perfection of our Ordinary Actions.” She offered practical suggestions for concentration of the intellect and choice of the will: to do each act separately as if it were the only one we had to do,¹⁷ to do the act as if it were the last act of our life,¹⁸ to look only at the present day and not at the future¹⁹, and to reject temptations of laziness.²⁰ In her treatise Catherine notes that to do something well the intention must be oriented only to God and not to human respect.²¹ Another treatise develops the orientation exclusively to God. “Of the Purity of Intention We Should Have in All Our Actions” remained unfinished; however the introduction reveals its significance: “All the goodness and perfection of our actions depend upon the purity of our intention and will be more and more valuable in proportion as we increase in this pure and simple intention.”²² She summarizes her principles: “Let us see in what the goodness of our actions consists that thereby we may the better know the means of performing them well. It consists in two things, of which the first and chief is, that we act purely for God... The second thing required is that we perform all our actions as well as we possibly can.”²³

Fostering Human Dignity in Apostolic Work

Gaudium et spes #4 offers a gripping analysis of the human situation in the world “with critical and swift upheavals spreading gradually to all corners of the earth,” and with “a huge proportion of the people of the world ... plagued by hunger and extreme need while countless numbers are totally illiterate.” Nineteenth century Ireland shared in this particular human situation due in great part to the effects of the Penal Laws, which were a “body of legislation operative from the 16th to the 19th century, mainly in England, Scotland, and Ireland, designed to discriminate against and oppress Catholics in the exercise of their religious, political, social, and cultural life.”²⁴ Because of natural famines in the countryside, families could not always afford to feed their children. Young women were sent into urban centres to find employment. Starvation, urbanization, and industrialization uprooted the traditional structure of families, and consequently young women were faced with many threats to their human dignity.

Catherine McAuley’s apostolic work moved into these situations of woundedness, and sought to elevate them by creating intermediate institutional structures of support for young women of good character in need. In 1824 she purchased property in Dublin, and for three years watched over the construction of a large building. On September 24, 1827 Catherine McAuley opened her House of Mercy for “Distressed Women, Orphans, and School.”²⁵ The school helped many to overcome illiteracy. The Penal laws lifted just prior to the founding of the First House of Mercy had prohibited tutoring to a Catholic family, forbidden Catholic

schools, and even prohibited Catholics from going abroad for their education. Mother Catherine wrote a letter signed by the Archbishop of Dublin to request funds for her project. A portion of the letter follows:

In these schools five hundred poor girls may daily experience the blessing of religious instruction, and being practiced in various branches of industry come forward shielded from all the evils incident to ignorance and idleness, prepared as Christians to discharge the duties of the humble state in life to which it has pleased God to call them.

Young tradeswomen of good character who have employment yet not sufficient means to provide safe lodging are invited to this house at night as their home—practiced in prayer and meditation, prepared for Sacraments and guarded against the dangers that surround them.²⁶

Many Catholics had been educated secretly in “hedge schools;” but they had not had the benefit of an open and high quality education.

In addition to free schools for the poor, Catherine McAuley also opened pension schools for middle class children.²⁷ Speaking in her *Familiar Instructions* to the Sisters about the need to have great confidence in God for the apostolate of education, Catherine McAuley concluded: “It will lead us to undergo, with sweetness, all the labour and fatigue attendant on the care and instruction of children, and it will animate us with a burning zeal for their advancement in every virtue.”²⁸ This zeal for fostering virtue in those who were taught promoted the full development of the human personality.²⁹

Venerable Catherine opened an employment office to train women to find suitable jobs. In 1838 Mother Catherine wrote to Francis Warde that: “Twenty went to situations in one week and twenty more came in.”³⁰ She also followed up on the work environment where they were placed. “Experience had shown her how lacking in home-training were so many poor mothers and how much unhappiness and ill-health were caused by their inability to cook well.”³¹ Catherine McAuley opened a laundry business in the Home of Mercy to provide both work experience and income for many women. She helped girls with criminal records for stealing or prostitution to find alternate ways to support themselves. One historian summarized: “During her visits among the poor, she was deeply impressed by the necessity of providing Preventive Help rather than Corrective Help. Many unemployed young girls, seeking the means of an honest livelihood, became the victims of unprincipled men who took advantage of their penury.”³² *Gaudium et spes* echoes a similar concern in its section #27, subtitled “Respect for the Human Person”:

Wishing to come down to topics that are practical and of some urgency, the Council lays stress on respect for the human person: everyone should look upon his neighbour (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way ...

Today there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbour of every man, no matter who he is, and if we meet him, to come to his aid in a positive way... calling to mind the words of Christ: “As you did it to one of the least of

these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40)

The varieties of crime are numerous:...all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as...undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions,... prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions...

Mother McAuley bore witness to a fundamental theme in *Gaudium et spes* #26, enhancing human dignity by working for the common good. Common good is “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.” *Gaudium et spes* #26 also clearly articulates the theme of human dignity:

... there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. He ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing, the right freely to choose his state of life and set up a family, the right to education, work, to his good name, to respect, to proper knowledge, the right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard his privacy, and rightful freedom even in matters of religion.

Visitation of the sick was as important as education to the original Institute of the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters visited the sick in “Dublin’s Protestant Administered Hospitals, notably Sir Patrick Dun’s, Mercer’s, Madam Spenser’s, the Coombe, and the Hospital for Incurables in Donnybrook...” They also visited sick Catholics in their homes and in jails.³³ Just as Catherine McAuley and her Sisters of Mercy elevated the professional level of education in her solidarity with the ignorant poor, together they also elevated the professional level of tending to the sick poor. They trained health-care personnel and introduced measures to improve cleanliness and to control infection in the places where the sick were treated.

In their apostolic work with the dying the purpose was to prepare the person for union with God. Mother Catherine McAuley anticipated the claim in *Gaudium et spes* #19 that “[t]he dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God.” Although in nineteenth century Ireland, the systematic atheisms and agnosticisms which are prevalent today were lacking, individuals who came under the care of the Sisters of Mercy often had fallen into a practical atheism or agnosticism by habits of neglect in relation to the practice of their faith. In her *Familiar Instructions* Catherine offers the Sisters a flexible approach to men and women in different states:

We should use judgment in the instructions and prayers, to adapt them to the spiritual wants of those we visit. The fervent, we should inspire with sentiments of love, confidence and resignation. The indifferent and careless, with fear of God’s judgments, humility and contrition ...

...it unburdens (sic.) the mind of some, to make known all their little trials; and thus, it is well to listen to them, in order to gain their confidence, and to draw them to God ...

We should never forget that the spiritual good of the sick is to be our spiritual aim...

Where there is no hope of recovery, charity requires that we make it known gradually and cautiously, lest the patient be too much alarmed. We may suggest many motives for resignation; such as vanity of the world, the necessity that all lie under of leaving it, sooner or later; the happiness of dying in God's grace ...³⁴

She suggested that her Sisters refrain from getting caught in theological arguments with men who would make fun of them and that they also refrain from offering advice on temporal affairs to the sick or to their families. She taught that the Sacrament of Reconciliation with God was an important avenue to experience the Mercy of God.³⁵ All of Catherine McAuley's apostolic works and those of the Institute she founded were to be done in the spirit of charity, or love for the good of the suffering poor, sick, or ignorant person.

II Solidarity with the Poor, Sick, and Ignorant

The Preface to *Gaudium et spes* #1 is subtitled "Solidarity of the church with the whole human family." Its well-known first sentence begins to unfold the meaning of solidarity: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well." Initially, Catherine McAuley thought that solidarity with the poor meant sharing in the same impoverished conditions. She later realized that her charism of Mercy sought to elevate human dignity and therefore required a different kind of solidarity. Roland Burke Savage, S.J. described her discovery this way:

Catherine's exactitude with regard to the practice of poverty was extreme and her desire to share fully in the hardships of the poor led her in the early days to be over-austere in the diet and clothing provided for herself and her Sisters... In consequence of the poor diet, many of the Sisters, who were greatly overworked as well as undernourished, fell seriously ill with violent scurvy... [The Surgeon General, Sir Philip Crampton] at once declared that an improved diet would be the best cure, and especially ordered beer for the Sisters. He tried to convince Catherine that the work of visitation of the sick was necessarily severe and unwholesome, and that, consequently, special care must be taken to build up the constitutions of the Sisters engaged in it.³⁶

Solidarity with the poor, sick, and ignorant involved a different kind of self-gift than simply sharing the same inhuman conditions. It involved an attempt to elevate the person and the situation. Sr. Mary Ignatia Neumann, R.S.M. summarized the sisters foundation in Birmingham, England:

At the time of its erection there were neither church nor schools in the neighbourhood and the principal active duties the sisters were called upon to undertake were the care of the orphans, the visitation of the sick, and instruction of adults. Great numbers of these of different conditions of life were prepared to receive the sacraments and in a comparatively short time the sisters

had the consolation of seeing as fruit of their labours many hundreds becoming good practical Catholics.³⁷

In her conversion Mother Catherine anticipated the meaning of solidarity in *Gaudium et spes* #32 as "... everyone rendering mutual service to each other in measure of gift bestowed on each." In solidarity with the poor, sick, and ignorant the Sisters of Mercy offered the gifts of their professional training, their religious consecration, their friendship, and their material goods of shelter, clothing, and food. Mother Catherine stated in one letter: "A prevailing influenza among the poor of Dublin and great poverty—the Sisters are constantly engaged."³⁸ Neumann observed in his reflection on the Birr foundation: "Poor schools were opened, later on Mother McAuley wrote saying the Bishop had decided the Sisters would take charge of National Schools. They had been founded nine years previously and were looked upon doubtfully by the Church."³⁹

In return, the sisters received the gift of sharing in the development of human persons from situations of degradation and impoverishment into citizens capable of making significant contributions to the world. Solidarity becomes the incarnation of being a "neighbour." In *Gaudium et spes* #27 we read: "There is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbour of every man, no matter who he is, and if we meet him, to come to his aid in a positive way..." In a section entitled "Human Solidarity," #1948 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* these same principles are repeated: "Solidarity is an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones. *Gaudium et spes* #30 elevates this virtue to a "a sacred duty" to try to elevate the human condition: "The best way to fulfil one's obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one's means and the needs of others, even to the point of fostering and helping public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life." Clearly the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and England were attempting to practice this virtue as a sacred duty of their vocation.

The reign of God is built when through Jesus Christ "everyone as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each" (*GS* #32). Solidarity anticipates and prepares the way for the union of the family of God with the Holy Trinity at the end of time. The eschatological dimension of solidarity is clearly recognized in *Gaudium et spes* #32: "This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day when it will be brought to fulfilment; on that day mankind, saved by grace, will offer perfect glory to God as the family beloved of God and of Christ their brother." This eschatological dimension of the vocation to the Religious Sisters of Mercy becomes transparent in the Homes of Mercy founded by Mother Catherine McAuley: "Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come" (*GS* #39).

III Urgent Problems for the Church in the Modern World

The Preface to Part Two of *Gaudium et spes* identifies five urgent problems “deeply affecting the human race at the present day in the light of the Gospel and of human experience” (#46): 1) marriage and the family, 2) the proper development of culture, 3) economics and social life, 4) the political community, and 5) the fostering of peace. Venerable Catherine McAuley identified these same problems in the nineteenth century. She initiated effective responses to each problem as appropriate apostolic works for her Consecrated Sisters.

Marriage and the Family

Gaudium et spes' discussion of marriage begins with a very strong premise: “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life (#47).” After describing various aspects of crisis in marriage and the family, *Gaudium et spes* #52 encourages various groups to work collaboratively supporting the family: “Everyone, therefore, who exercises an influence in the community and in social groups should devote himself effectively to the welfare of marriage and the family.”

Catherine McAuley intervened to support families in distress. For example, when the Baggot street residence was opened Catherine initiated a special Christmas dinner, modelled on the place of the child Jesus in the Holy Family, for many poor children and orphans in the vicinity of the Home of Mercy. This annual dinner continued for many years afterward. In addition, Catherine took great interest in the education of her nieces and nephews. She also protected her family members from public scandal. In one situation of domestic violence with her brother-in-law Catherine was threatened with a gun. She escaped in the middle of the night, but did not ruin his reputation by publicly indicating what he had said or done to her.⁴⁰

In the Home of Mercy Mother McAuley supported and formed young women who were to become married. She developed programs for young girls of good character who otherwise would be exposed to precarious living and working situations in Dublin. Sister Teresa Carroll described it this way: “The Foundress build a house for these women, of whom seventy was the average number protected... The average period of their stay was three or four months... They were trained to laundry-work, needle-work, or whatever else they seemed best suited for; and were told, they could expect no recommendation for the Sisters unless their diligence deserved it.”⁴¹ Mother Catherine reasoned that these women would likely become married, and that it would be of benefit to them to be educated in crafts associated with homemaking. Most of the women came from impoverished backgrounds where they had not had the opportunity to learn how to care for linens, china, silver, and good furniture, or to develop the etiquette proper to upper or middle class society.

Because of the penal laws these young women also often did not know

even how to read or write. Consequently, the Sisters of Mercy began to educate these women with a view to supporting marriage, especially in the middle classes. They started a sewing business and laundry so that the women could learn how to make and care for clothing. Mother Catherine wrote to Sister Francis Warde from Dublin, April 1838 the following words: “We are likely to have the long desired public Laundry built this season; ... What a comfort if I am permitted to see some secure means of supporting our poor women and children established, not to be entirely depending on daily collections which are so difficult to keep up. We would soon have a valuable Laundry as the neighbourhood is so good.”⁴² The Sisters taught the women residents how to read and write, and they taught them etiquette for easeful interaction with people from different social levels in society.

The Sisters opened an employment agency so that they could place these women in the homes of the wealthy until such time as they chose to marry. Mother Catherine describes in one letter this approach in Dublin: “The workhouses have not lessened our number. We have at this moment 52, and to speak of the poorhouse to any of them is a kind of condemnation.”⁴³ Sister Angela Bolster summarizes Catherine McAuley’s work: “... her House of Mercy was at once a Hostel for working girls, an Institute of Adult Education, and Employment Bureau—the first of its kind for women in Ireland—and a Sheltered Workshop.”⁴⁴ This combination of an employment agency, laundry and sewing business, and home to live in during training continued throughout the years after the foundresses’ death. For example, in a description of the foundation at Booterstown we read: “The convent has changed little in appearance since the time of the Foundress but the work has increased considerably. Besides nursing the sick and visiting the poor there is a National School and St. Anne Children’s Home where orphan are well-housed and fed, in addition there is an Industrial School for girls.”⁴⁵

Catherine McAuley followed the situations of the women closely while they were working in other people’s homes to be sure they were not exploited. In one situation, in which it appeared as though a husband intended to make a young woman his mistress, Catherine McAuley intervened directly by confronting the man in person and freed the girl from this compromising situation. Her decision to allow women of good character to live in the Home of Mercy for a few months until they were able to earn their own living came from a failure she had experienced earlier in asking an establishment which decided things by committee and therefore was unable to accept a woman in immediate danger of seduction by her employer.

Proper Development of Culture

Gaudium et spes analyzes the remarkable interrelation between culture and the development of the human person: “It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. (#53)” A caution is

raised in #59: even though culture is essential for the development of the person, it must never dominate the person. "...culture must be subordinated to the integral development of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole of mankind."

In the Ireland of Mother McAuley's time, the Protestant English culture had done everything possible to erase the memory of the Catholic Irish culture. Priests were put to death, the faithful forbidden to receive the Sacraments, monasteries destroyed, and Catholic schools closed. People were unable to live the inherited culture of the Catholic Faith.⁴⁶ Into this situation Catherine McAuley created institutions to enable the reflowering of Irish Catholic Culture.

Bessie Belloc in *Historic Nuns* describes the rich notion of culture which was embodied in the education of the Sisters themselves:

Another main object, and, indeed, the primary end of the Order of Mercy, was the instructing of the ignorant; the getting real thought and real principle into the minds of children and empty-headed adults. To this end Mother M' Auley spared no pains in training the young Sisters for their duties. Besides a thorough English education, which she considered indispensable, she made the Sisters keep up in music, for the Church; painting, useful in many ways; and foreign languages, so necessary for the Sisters who visited the prisons and hospitals of seaport towns.⁴⁷

Culture, for Catherine McAuley, meant far more than simply reading and writing. It included all the arts. For example, at the foundation in Carlow, "...[t]he girls are obliged to acquire a perfect knowledge of the lessons at home, so that to hear the classes is all [sic.]: one French, another Grammar and Geography, and so on."⁴⁸ One educator described it, "her aim [was] to educate and elevate..."⁴⁹

"A poet by nature"⁵⁰ Catherine McAuley often communicated with her Sisters in limericks. When the Sisters in one convent were particularly saddened, she recommended two hours of Irish dancing each evening for recreation. Further, she stated that every Home of Mercy should have a piano. In addition to poetry and music, the appearances of the convents and the Sister's habits should be simple but beautiful. Aesthetics transmitted the culture of religious life.

Education of the Sisters in professional areas was also emphasized. Between 1824 and 1827 Catherine McAuley studied the teaching pedagogy of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in France and in Irish Protestant Schools operated by the Kildare Place Society to enhance her teaching of Catholic children.⁵¹ As a novice with the Presentation Sisters, she observed their classroom technique in educating children at George's Hill Convent School.⁵² She expected her Sisters to prepare for the National Board of Education Examination of Irish Schools offered by the state since 1832. Catherine McAuley argued: "...to teach well, kindness and prudence, though indispensable, will not suffice without the solid foundation of a good education,

and a judicious method of imparting knowledge.”⁵³ Catherine McAuley also “pioneered the introduction of the Monitorial System of Education for Girls in Ireland.”⁵⁴ In this system young women were given a teacher-training program.⁵⁵

Religious education and culture were equally important for those who would work in catechesis. Catherine’s own ability in catechesis was renowned as it led to the conversion of many of her family members and acquaintances to the Catholic faith. Catherine McAuley wrote a dialogue entitled *The Cottage Controversy* as a way of elevating apologetical discussions.⁵⁶ In *The Cottage Controversy* a poor Catholic woman catechized a wealthy Protestant woman. This catechetical device fits the cultural context of Ireland and echoes a view expressed in an 1833 letter that her foundation “is the first to be erected in the midst of the Protestant nobility ... at a time when they (the Protestants) were employing wealth and influence to allure Catholics from their faith.”⁵⁷

Catherine McAuley decided that the middle class in Ireland was particularly neglected in education. Upper class boys and girls were educated by Jesuit and Ursuline religious communities and the lower classes in the schools of the Christian Brothers and Presentation Sisters. Mother Catherine selected the middle class children for education. In this she anticipates *Gaudium et spes* #60:

Man is now offered the possibility to free most of the human race from the curse of ignorance: it is, therefore, one of the duties most appropriate to our times, above all for Christians, to work untiringly for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs, on the national as well as the international level, which will ensure the recognition and implementation everywhere of the right of every man to human and civil culture in harmony with the dignity of the human person, without distinction of race, sex, nation, religion, or social circumstances. Hence it is necessary to ensure that there is a sufficiency of cultural benefits available to everybody, especially the benefit of what is called “basic” culture, lest any be prevented by illiteracy and lack of initiative from contributing in an authentically human way to the common good.

The Sisters of Mercy opened schools for large numbers of children. In her first written request for the architectural design of the large house on Baggot Street, she stipulated “[v]ery large rooms for poor schools, three of four.”⁵⁸ At the beginning 200 children were received, but eventually as many as 500 children were taught at one time by six to eight teachers.⁵⁹ At Kingstown 300 children were taught, in Cork around 1200, and by 1911 it was estimated that the Sisters of Mercy had over 200,000 children in their schools.⁶⁰ These children were educated with a harmony between their culture and Christian formation.

Economic and Social Life

Mother Catherine McAuley’s emphasis on building up the middle class also served an economic value. It tended to lessen the radical difference between the very rich and the very poor. “The purpose of the penal code was to destroy the economic life of Ireland and to demoralize and enfeeble its people.”⁶¹ Because Ireland’s penal laws were repealed only in 1829, the very rich tended to be

Protestants and the very poor Catholics. By inheriting a large sum of money from Protestants who converted to Catholicism, Catherine McAuley moved easily between poor and rich. She would use fashion and wealth to gain advantages for the poor. For example, she dressed well, rode in her carriage, to gain entrance to a Protestant School in order to learn its teaching methodologies for later application to Catholic schools. In the *Positio super virtutibus* we read the following description of her Venerable Catherine's ingenuity:

Whenever, therefore, she wished to urge her application for admittance into any of those establishments where she thought her services likely to be useful, she always took care to pay her first visit in her own carriage and attended by servants. She did this, not from any motive of ostentation or display, but from a wish to remove the obstacles that the world might raise to the fulfilment of her charitable designs. She wished to vanquish the world and its prejudices with its own weapons.⁶²

She did the same to visit Catholic patients in a hospital which forbade Catholics to visit. Catherine's personality then enabled her to assume a more humble presence to educate and visit the sick without using the artifice of her wealth. In this way, Catherine McAuley was an economic mediator.

Gaudium et spes #63 begins the section on economic and social life with a fundamental principle: "In the sphere of economics and social life, too, the dignity and entire vocation of the human person as well as the welfare of society as a whole have to be respected and fostered; for man is the source, the focus and the end of all economic and social life." Then in #67, the dignity of manual labour is emphasized:

Moreover, we believe by faith that through the homage of work offered to God man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, whose labour with his hands at Nazareth greatly ennobled the dignity of work. This is the source of every man's duty to work loyally as well as his right to work; moreover, it is the duty of society to see to it that, according to the prevailing circumstances, all citizens have the opportunity of finding employment.

Mother Catherine's efforts in women's employment were discriminating in placement of persons:

Suitable employment shall be sought for, and great care taken to place them in *situations for which they are adapted*, in order that they may continue such length of time in them as shall establish a character on which they can depend for future support. Many leave their situations, not so much for want of merit as through incapacity to fulfil the duties in which they unwisely engaged. They shall not be encouraged to remain long in the House of Mercy, as in general it would be better for them soon to enter on that state and employment by which they are to live.⁶³

The focus on the development of the middle-class anticipates the call of *Gaudium et spes* to "an end to excessive economic and social differences." Section #66 describes: "To fulfil the requirements of justice and equity, every

effort must be made to put an end as soon as possible to the immense economic inequalities which exist in the world and increase from day to day, linked with individual and social discrimination, provided, of course, that the rights of individuals and the character of each people are not disturbed." Education and professional training enabled children and adults to assume their proper place in society. By providing temporary housing, the Sisters protected workers against inhuman living conditions, and by their training they protected them against being forced into employment which violated their personal dignity.

In one further area Catherine McAuley contributed to the urgent problem of economic development in the service of the common good. Before the repeal of the penal laws, Catholics in Ireland were not allowed to inherit property. This legal discrimination by the English against the Irish Catholics contravenes one of the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching. It is expressed in *Gaudium et spes* #91 as follows:

Private property and other forms of private ownership of external goods assures a person a highly necessary sphere for the exercise of his personal and family autonomy and ought to be considered as an extension of human freedom. Lastly, in stimulating exercise of responsibility, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberty.

The large inheritance Catherine McAuley received from her (previously) Protestant benefactors enabled her to build the large Home of Mercy. Private property enabled her to freely exercise her responsibility towards the poor distressed women and children of Dublin. Catherine distributed her wealth for the common good.

The Political Community

When we consider the meaning of "political community" for Catherine McAuley, it must be asserted that she understood herself and the Sisters in her Institute as belonging first and foremost to the Kingdom of God, and secondarily to a temporal political realm. With this conviction she vibrantly lived the teaching of *Gaudium et spes* #72, that "[a]nyone who in obedience to Christ seeks first the kingdom of God will derive from it a stronger and purer love for helping all his brethren and for accomplishing the task of justice under the inspiration of charity."

It may seem paradoxical to those familiar with Mother Catherine's maxims to discuss her contribution to the political community. She stated that politics was the one topic that Sisters should not discuss in the common life or in the context of apostolic works.⁶⁴ In Ireland, political antagonisms between English and Irish, upper class and lower class, Protestants and Catholics raged furiously. She wanted the Sisters to bring another dimension into the debate.

To hear nationalities discussed in a manner capable of wounding the most sensitive, would be exceedingly painful to her. And because England was regarded as the hereditary foe of Ireland, she did not allow politics to be

mentioned at recreation, lest any thing should escape an impulsive Hibernian, tending, in the slightest degree, to wound those who had crossed the sea, and left every thing they loved, to learn the maxims of perfection in [Ireland] ...⁶⁵

Because the Sisters were citizens of the city of God, they were sojourners in the city of man. For consecrated persons, acting as eschatological signs within the Church, refraining from political debate can be understood in the broad sense as a political act which anticipates the observation of *Gaudium et spes* #73 that: "...there is also an increase in tolerance for others who differ in opinion and religion..."

The actions of the Sisters of Mercy defended fundamental political rights in a situation in which the Penal Laws had barred Catholics from free public association, holding political office, serving on juries, and even voting. Catherine's decision to build her large house on Baggot street right in the middle of a wealthy Protestant section of Dublin expressed her position on the right of persons to free association. Catherine McAuley's constant opening of new avenues for Sisters of her institute to associate with Catholics publicly in hospitals and schools anticipated the principle articulated in #73 *Gaudium et spes*:

A keener awareness of human dignity has given rise in various parts of the world to an eagerness to establish a politico-judicial order in which the rights of the human person in public life will be better protected—for example, the right of free assembly and association, the right to express one's religion privately and publicly.

What was the political structure at the time of Catherine McAuley's work in her Institute of Mercy? Ireland was based on an aristocratic or royal model of government in which governing authority passed through blood lines. Catherine was well aware of this model. She used it to support the common good as attested in the well-known story of her boldly direct appeal to the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria for contributions to a bazaar to support the works of mercy of her Institute.⁶⁶ Not only did the contributions bring assistance to the poor, they also awakened in the members of the aristocracy a deeper philanthropic spirit.

Venerable Catherine often reflected on the inadequacy of the existing social class structure to meet the needs of the poor. She concluded that for the most part the upper classes no longer concerned themselves with the needs of the poor. They were caught in a round of self-centred social activities. The poor did not have the means to help other poor. Thus, she realized that primarily the middle class would be likely to assume the proper responsibilities for the common good. *Gaudium et spes* #74 describes a similar approach to appropriate political action:

Individuals, families, and the various groups which make up the civil community, are aware of their inability to achieve a truly human life by their own unaided efforts; they see the need for a wider community where each one will make a specific contribution to an even broader implementation of the

common good. For this reason they set up various forms of political communities. The political community, then, exists for the common good: this is its full justification and meaning and the source of its basic right to exist. The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families, and organizations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment.

Catherine McAuley encouraged the middle class to work towards the common good by their own contributions of money, goods, and time in participating together in volunteer work for bazaars to raise money for the poor through the apostolic works of the Sisters of Mercy. Furthermore, many young women were to dedicate their lives to the service of the poor by becoming Sisters of Mercy.

Fostering of Peace

If we begin with the fostering of peace in each Sister and move outwards in increasingly wider circles of activity until we reach apostolic work in international relations, this depicts how Catherine McAuley overcame the brutal reality of dissension and contributed towards the establishment of a community of nations. One of her favourite maxims was: “Whenever a religious woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.”⁶⁷

This article has come full circle. At its beginning we considered the call of a Consecrated Sister to strive to perfect herself through the ordinary actions of her daily life. The struggle to order passions and impulses and to conquer pride, fear, and anger is often called an interior battle or ongoing war with the effects of original sin in the self to achieve the goal of true peace. *Gaudium et spes* #78 gives a beautiful definition of the nature of peace:

Peace is more than the absence of war: it cannot be reduced to the maintenance of a balance of power between opposing forces nor does it arise out of despotic domination, but it is appropriately called “the effect of righteousness” (Is. 32:17). It is the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by man thirsting after an ever more perfect reign of justice. But while the common good of mankind ultimately derives from the eternal law, it depends upon circumstances which change as time goes on; consequently, peace will never be achieved once and for all, but must be built up continually. Since, moreover, human nature is weak and wounded by sin, the achievement of peace requires a constant effort to control the passions and unceasing vigilance by lawful authority.

Righteousness, a right and just ordering, in changing circumstances under lawful authority delineates the work for peace in all spheres of activity. Within the human person, the intellect and will order the passions and senses, in religious communities, the proper religious superiors guide the members of the institute, and in civil society, civil government provides authority and principles of order.

Catherine McAuley wrote a chapter in the Rule entitled “Of Union and Charity.” This chapter, based on a similar one taken from the Rule of the

Presentation Sisters, provided the only Rule of Life for guiding the Sisters of Mercy for the first ten years of the Institute's existence. Union and charity was the formula, as it were, for establishing peace among the Sisters within the Institute. Mother Catherine claimed that her only boast was that the sun never set on the anger of a Sister, and that "no breach of charity ever occurred among us."⁶⁸ Not letting the sun set on one's anger opened the way to resolution of conflict. Catherine McAuley's ardent prayer was:

Let charity then be our badge of honour... cherishing this virtue more by acts than words, so that it may truly be said, there is in us but one heart and one soul in God—one mind, one mode of acting and thinking—having His glory and our own sanctification ever in view. Perfect obedience will alone secure this union of hearts and opinions, for where all are submissive to lawful authority for God's love, no dissensions can arise, no conflicting sentiments be entertained amongst us.⁶⁹

Many practices aimed at fostering this attitude of charity within the religious institute. While dying Catherine McAuley reflected that the Sisters had truly effected this extraordinary charity and peace among themselves: "If you observe the peace and union which have never yet been violated amongst us, you will feel, even in this world, a happiness that will inspire you, and be to you a foretaste of the bliss prepared for everyone of you in Heaven."⁷⁰ This is echoed in *Gaudium et spes* #78:

A firm determination to respect the dignity of other men and other peoples along with the deliberate practice of fraternal love are absolutely necessary for the achievement of peace. Accordingly, peace is also the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can ensure.

Introducing charity into situations of conflict in order to bring true peace, extended beyond the religious institute. "The Spirit of the Institute" described this Mercy charism:

We learn by visiting prisons and hospitals, and by reconciling quarrels what misery there is in the world. We must try to be like those rivers which enter the sea, without losing any of the sweetness of the water. We must, in the midst of rudeness, impiety and impatience which we shall witness, preserve meekness, piety and unwearied patience.⁷¹

Promoting peace was practiced particularly in the conflict between English, Irish, and Scottish cultures. Catherine McAuley's numerous letters described her delight at the entrance of English and Scottish Sisters to her institute, in the foundations in Bermondsey and Birmingham, and in the reflections of others on her work to bridge cultural and religious antagonisms.⁷²

Pursuing peace occurred prominently in the eleventh foundation which Catherine McAuley made in 1840-1841. In a town called Birr, a schism developed among previously united members of the Catholic Church. The

parish priest in Birr, Dr. Spain appealed for help to Fr. Matthew, a priest in Galway, where the Sisters already had a foundation. The letter stated that “if a community of Sisters of Mercy could be established in Birr, peace would soon be restored to the Parish.”⁷³ This prophecy was fulfilled, and many families who had left the parish following the schismatic priest Dr. Crotty returned to the Catholic Church. Catherine McAuley wrote from Birr: “All the poor souls receive the Sisters with affection and confidence. Sister Aloysius has succeeded in bringing several of the unfortunate schismatics to seek reconciliation...”⁷⁴

In another kind of war, the Sisters of Mercy vigorously undertook the fight against serious diseases. When members of other religions and even family members hesitated to tend to those sick from cholera in the Dublin epidemic of 1832 the Sisters of Mercy worked day and night to care for those suffering from the disease.⁷⁵ They instituted a reordering of health-care discipline, and risking their own health and lives, served continuously in their visitation of the sick. Over 161 persons died in the first three weeks in this first epidemic. While none of the Sisters died in this particular epidemic, many were lost through disease in the early years of the Institute’s history.⁷⁶

In a later cholera epidemic in 1855 the Sisters from Ireland and England nursed soldiers during the Crimean war. The following description captures aspects of the situation: “No painting, however graphic, could convey a true idea of what they, one and all, endured in their self-imposed warfare with disease and sickness. In the stinging cold of an Eastern winter when everything was froze (sic.) hard, they were without a fire; their food was scanty, and so bad, that it reduced them to a choice between sickness and hunger.”⁷⁷ At the end of the war, the Sisters returned to London by ship. The English Protestant crowds began to loudly ridicule them, until the English soldiers aimed their rifles at the crowd, indicating the respect they had for the Catholic nurses. This was a gesture of solidarity of the soldiers for the Sisters who had sacrificed everything to save their lives. By their act of charity, the war-like atmosphere of conflict between English and Irish, Protestant and Catholic, was overturned and peace reigned. One source reflects that the Sisters of Mercy never were treated from that time on with disrespect on the streets of London.⁷⁸

In the broadest arena for the fostering of peace, *Gaudium et spes* reflects on the role of Christians in international organizations. In #90 we read: “For Christians one undoubtedly excellent form of international activity is the part they play, either individually or collectively, in organizations set up or on the way to being set up to foster cooperation between nations.” The Irish foundations and institutions acted as leaven in the international community. Catherine McAuley promoted the autonomy of local communities, which gave a flexibility to make new foundations, while other Congregations preferred a more centralized governing structure.⁷⁹ The dual principles of local autonomy and flexibility in the government of Sisters of Mercy foundations was common not only with respect to responses to the needs of the external apostolate, but also to the reception and formation of new candidates.⁸⁰

One historian notes that “[t]he spread of the Order of Mercy is a confirmation of Aristotle’s principle of philosophy, “Bonum est diffusivum sui —” “The Good has a tendency to diffuse itself.”⁸¹ At Catherine McAuley’s death in 1841 there were fourteen autonomous foundations. “In Ireland alone, seventy-seven (77) independent foundations were made between 1831 and 1894; by the latter date the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy had penetrated into every Irish diocese.”⁸² By 1950 there were foundations of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland (198), England and Wales (108), Scotland (7), New Foundland (14), Australia (252), New Zealand (46), the United States of America (861), Central American and West Indies (6), South America (12), and South Africa (5).⁸³

In addition to the governing principles of local autonomy and flexibility, Catherine McAuley also indicated that there should be frequent communication and dialogue both within and among her convents. She lived this principle daily within her communities by leading two hours of recreation each evening in which the Sisters spoke with one another about the daily events. Her letters followed her Sisters making other foundations. She extended the mercy tradition of continuous dialogue. In the conclusion of *Gaudium et spes* (#92) we find a section entitled “Dialogue between all men:”

In virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the Gospel and gather together in one Spirit all men of every nation, race and culture, the Church shows itself as a sign of the spirits of brotherhood which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it.

Gaudium et spes #92 encourages us to have “eagerness for such dialogue, conducted with appropriate discretion and leading to truth by way of love alone... Since God the Father is the beginning and the end of all things, we are all called to be brothers; we ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace.”⁸⁴

In conclusion, inspired by their spousal bond with Jesus Christ, the Sisters of Mercy entered dynamically into the five urgent problem areas to strengthen human dignity in solidarity with the poor, sick, and ignorant; they defended marriage and the family, supported the proper development of culture, economic and political life, and fostered peace.

- 1 For an elaboration of the importance of these two principles see Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council* (London: Collins, 1980), III, iii, 273–309.
- 2 *The First Conferences of Mother Catherine McAuley* taken from personal, handwritten notebooks by Mother Mary Timothea from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy Carrysford Park, Black Rock (Dublin, Ireland) and edited by Sr. Mary Cora Uryase, R.S.M.
- 3 *Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* in *Documents of Vatican II*, Austin P. Flannery, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984).
- 4 This passage was recently reemphasized by Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor (The Splendor of Truth)* (Québec: Editions Paulines, 1993), #38 and restated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image Book, 1994) #1730.
- 5 This characteristic is emphasized in the *Positio Super Virtutibus of Catharinnae McAuley* (Roma: Guerra, 1986), edited by Sister Angela Bolster, R.S.M. “Catherine’s response to need

- was extra courageous in that her Mission of Mercy—in school, on visitation and in the House of Mercy—was in full swing two years before Catholic Emancipation was secured by Daniel O'Connell in 1829.”, 43.
- 6 Catherine McAuley, *Maxims and Counsels of our Beloved Foundress Gathered from Her Life, Letters, Sayings, and the Annals of the Order*, arranged by a Sister of Mercy, Bantry (Essex: The Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, 1988), Maxim for August 7.
 - 7 Mother Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences*, Chapter I, 4.
 - 8 Rev. Mother McAuley, *Familiar Instructions*, Sisters of Mercy, St. Louis, Mo., eds (St. Louis, Ev.E. Carreas, 1888), Chapter I: Of the Object of the Institute, 1.
 - 9 Mother Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences*, Chapter II, 7.
 - 10 Mother Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences*, Chapter 6, 15. See also Chapter 6, 14.
 - 11 Mother Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences*, Chapter 6, 15.
 - 12 Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences* Chapter 10, 26.
 - 13 Catherine McAuley's *First Conferences*, Chapter 14, 36 and Chapter 7,17.
 - 14 Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences*, Chapter 16, 41 and Chapter 7, 17–18.
 - 15 Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences* Chapter 9, 23.
 - 16 Catherine McAuley, *First Conferences*, Chapter 18, 45.
 - 17 Catherine McAuley, *Second Treatise in First Conferences*, Chapter 4, 7.
 - 18 Catherine McAuley, *Second Treatise*, Chapter 5, 9.
 - 19 Catherine McAuley, *Second Treatise*, Chapter 6, 11.
 - 20 Catherine McAuley, *Second Treatise*, Chapter 8, 14. She uses the words “sloth or tepidity in and of their actions.”
 - 21 Catherine McAuley, *Second Treatise*, Chapter 1, 2 and Chapter 3,5.
 - 22 Catherine McAuley, *Third Treatise in First Conferences*, I, 1.
 - 23 Catherine McAuley, *Second Treatise* Chapter 3, 5–6.
 - 24 *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York et al.: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. xi. 62. See also Sr. Mary Ignatia Neumann, R.S.M., introduction to the foundation in Bermondsey, England, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969): “Catholic life was at a low ebb due to over three hundred years of religious persecution under the Penal Laws imposed by England.”, 178.
 - 25 Sister Hilda Miley, A.M., *The Ideals of Mother McAuley and Their Influence: Foundress, Educator, Social Welfare Worker*, (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1931), 25.
 - 26 Neumann, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 68.
 - 27 Miley, *The Ideals of Mother McAuley*, 38. See also, Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 269.
 - 28 McAuley, *Familiar Instructions*, Chapter II: Of the Schools, 12.
 - 29 Miley, *The Ideals of Mother McAuley*, 33–36.
 - 30 Neumann, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 116.
 - 31 Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 268.
 - 32 Miley, *The Ideals of Mother McAuley*, 51–52.
 - 33 Angela Bolster, RSM, *Venerable Catherine McAuley: Liminal for Mercy* (Cork: Convent of Our Lady of Mercy, 1998), 12–13.
 - 34 McAuley, *Familiar Instructions*, Chapter III: Of the Visitation of the Sick, 18–21.
 - 35 Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, II.820.
 - 36 Roland Burke Savage, S.J., M.A., *Catherine McAuley: The First Sister of Mercy* (Dublin, M.H. Gill and Son Ltd., 1950), 137–8.
 - 37 Neumann, R.S.M, introduction to Birmingham, England, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 368.
 - 38 See McAuley, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 195.
 - 39 Neumann, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 279.
 - 40 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 80–83. See also *Positio Super Virtutibus*, I. 59.
 - 41 Mother Teresa Austin Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley: Foundress and First Superior of the Institute of Religious Sisters of Mercy* (St. Louis, Mo. The Vincentian Press, 1866), 148–9.
 - 42 Neumann, ed, *The Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 122. See also, McAuley, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 166.
 - 43 McAuley, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 324.
 - 44 Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, I.224.

- 45 Neumann, ed, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 120.
- 46 Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, II.724–5.
- 47 Bessie R. Belloc, *Historic Nuns* (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1911; London: Edinburgh, and Glasgow: Sands and Company, 1889), 93.
- 48 McAuley, *Positio super virtutibus*, I.490.
- 49 Bolster, quoting Augustus Orestes Brownson, in *Positio super virtutibus*, II. 726.
- 50 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 3.
- 51 Bolster, *Venerable Catherine McAuley*, 5 and 11.
- 52 Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 267.
- 53 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 174.
- 54 Bolster, *Venerable Catherine McAuley*, 11.
- 55 See McAuley, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 232.
- 56 Catherine McAuley, *The Cottage Controversy* (New York: P. O’Shea, 1883).
- 57 Bolster, *Venerable Catherine McAuley*, Letter to Brother Rice, December 8, 1833, 5.
- 58 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 92.
- 59 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 170.
- 60 Belloc, *Historic Nuns*, 96–98.
- 61 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, XI, 67.
- 62 Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, I. 77.
- 63 Catherine McAuley, “Admission of Distressed Women,” in *Positio super virtutibus*, I.199, #2. Also in Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 149.
- 64 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 163.
- 65 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 380.
- 66 Carroll, *Life of Catherine McAuley*, 193–4.
- 67 Catherine McAuley, “Maxims.” Arranged by Mother Mary Timothea Elliott, RSM, Maxim for January 11.
- 68 McAuley, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 155. In another letter she said: “The blessing of unity still dwells amongst us and oh what a blessing, it should make all things else pass into nothing.”, 330. Also in Bolster, *Venerable Catherine McAuley*, 20.
- 69 McAuley, *Familiar Instructions*, chapter xvi: Of Union and Charity, 107.
- 70 Belloc, *Historic Nuns*, 123.
- 71 As quoted in Bolster, *Venerable Catherine McAuley*, 20.
- 72 See Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, “Through her courageous enterprise, Catherine McAuley brought Catholicism out from the hidden places of the Hidden Ireland. With her it superseded political strife and religious bigotry.”, I.298.
- 73 Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 330.
- 74 Sister M. Bertrand Degan, R.S.M., *Mercy Unto Thousands: Life of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley—Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1957), 299–301. See also, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 298.
- 75 See *Positio super virtutibus*, I.140–143.
- 76 Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 147. See also *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, 206 and 213.
- 77 Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 403.
- 78 Belloc, *Historic Nuns*, 110–112.
- 79 See Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 261 and Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, I.295.
- 80 See Carroll, *The Life of Catherine McAuley*, for her principles of general government and their application to the case of the entrance and formation of Lady Barbara Eyre in England., 319–23.
- 81 Miley, *The Ideas of Mother McAuley*, 59.
- 82 Bolster, *Positio super virtutibus*, II.851.
- 83 Savage, *Catherine McAuley*, 407–410.
- 84 With gratitude for suggestions for composition and revision of this article by Mother Mary Timothea Elliott, RSM, SSD, Sr. Mary Judith O’Brien, RSM, JDC, JD, and Sister Rita Rae Schneider, RSM, PhD. It was presented at the *Symposium on Catherine McAuley*, held in Alma, Michigan on September 24–25, 2000.