

CREATIVITY – A KEY STEP IN MERCY’S DANCE

Known in many places around the globe as Armistice Day, marking the end of the World War 1, November 11 is better remembered in our circles of Mercy as the anniversary of Catherine McAuley’s death in 1841, just 10 years after she founded the Sisters of Mercy.

Her own expectations of what would happen to the foundation after her death were typically self-effacing, preferring instead to trust in God’s will and providential care. The community she would eventually leave “is not our own work but God’s, who could cause the Institute to be formed and to exist without our being created,” Catherine wrote in her Retreat Instructions. “After we are gone, everything will go on, no duty will be omitted, just as if we had never existed...We should remember, whether we are noticed or not, the time will come in a few years, when we and our actions will be forgotten and unknown.”

In a small garden cemetery behind her house in Baggot Street, Catherine was buried, on her own instructions, “in the same way as poor people - in the earth.” Since 1910, the grave has been sheltered by a small stone oratory which has become a focus for those who come in pilgrimage to learn more about the founder of the Sisters of Mercy and to seek inspiration from the story of her life. On a plaque inside the oratory are the words of her famous *Suscipe*, the prayer which begins, ‘My God, I am Yours for time and eternity.’

Do we honour Catherine best by recalling the past, or by setting our gaze on what lies ahead? Is mission best served by our remembering her story, or by looking to the future? In a thought-provoking book, *The New Zealand Project*, young Kiwi academic Max Harris lists three ‘cornerstone progressive values’ for those intent on changing the world for the better. The first two of his three Cs are familiar to anyone involved in Mercy’s ministries - care, which he understands as ‘a concern for the wellbeing of others’ and exemplified by the Māori terms of *manaakitanga* and *aroha*; and community, which recognises ‘the connectedness and interdependence of people’, and is embodied in the Māori notion of *whanaungatanga*, kinship or building of family relationships.

The third C may strike a new note in our reflection on core values. Harris names creativity as third in his list, a value ‘rarely referred to’ in discussions of progressive politics, he says. It’s the value that is involved “when discussing the need for innovative new solutions to social challenges.” It is in tension with the value of tradition, says Max Harris.



Catherine McAuley’s grave at Baggot Street... buried ‘in the same way as poor people, in the earth.’

Creativity corresponds to the Māori concept of *auahatanga*, a new term for our Mercy vocabulary perhaps. But it’s there in Pa Ryan’s *Dictionary of Modern Māori*, from the verb *auaha*, meaning to create or to jump for joy.

Catherine would have loved to see those two words linked together. She knew what it was to dance and to jump for joy. And she was in many ways a creative woman, well ahead of her times - insisting on a new way for living as a religious, in the world rather than shut away from it, going out to the poor and needy rather than enclosed behind a convent wall.

Taihoa, spare a moment.....

Recall for yourself or share with a colleague an instance in Catherine McAuley's life where she broke with tradition to create a new path for mercy to flow.

What changes in your Mercy world does this memory suggest to you? How might Catherine respond if she was in your shoes today?

She knew how to build bridges between groups in society, to put the rich in touch with the poor, joining the well to the sick and dying, linking those with power to those with none.

Creativity, writes Max Harris, "takes us towards concerns of the heart as well as of the head. Towards playfulness, lightness and variety. We need more of it in New Zealand politics." We may need more of it in Mercy, as well, and it's Catherine's life that reminds us of this.

– **Dennis Horton**

Kia inoi tatou – Let us pray:

As we remember the life of Catherine McAuley, let us give thanks for her creativity, her openness to the new, and her joy in finding fresh ways of letting God's mercy be seen by the poor. May we rejoice in reaching out, as she did, to those who might never expect that things can change for the better. Amen.

A SUSTAINABLE GOAL CLOSE TO CATHERINE'S HEART

From her first-hand experience of the conditions in which she spent her whole life, Catherine McAuley knew what a difference decent work and pay could make to the people around her. Her primary objective in using her inheritance to build a House of Mercy in Dublin was to provide training opportunities for the girls and young women she watched at every turn, enabling them to find a job and earn the means to support themselves and their families. It's not surprising that of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations, Goal No 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth – is among the eight chosen by the Mercy International Association as 'most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy.'

Indicators identified by the United Nations in pursuit of this goal include an expanding annual growth rate of GDP, especially in the least developed countries. Goal 8 also requires an ongoing commitment to efficiency in consumption and production, seeking to uncouple economic growth from damage to the environment. It also seeks to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities. The goal includes a commitment to equal pay for work of equal value.

The goal recommends that within the next five years (by 2020) there be a substantial reduction in the numbers of young people (aged 15-24) not in education, employment or training.

While GDP is one way of assessing development, Pope Francis has warned against using this as the sole measure of a nation's well-being. A growing

GDP may hide, for instance, disastrous gaps between the super-rich and the utterly destitute. It may be used to justify a "free" market, without political oversight or regulation.

Pope Francis insists that true development must be sustainable, resting on three legs – economic, social and environmental. And if one leg is neglected, the entire structure may collapse. The solution, in Catholic social teaching, is to

choose solidarity over self-interest, the common good over profit maximization, and sustainability over short-termism. This does not mean rejecting the market; but it does mean recognising the market has clear limits, and keeping it under human and ethical control.

The last word on this topic goes to the late US Republican and former gridiron player, Jack Kemp. "Economic growth doesn't mean anything, if it leaves people out."

