

SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS

It was necessary to structure the Schema around a Conciliar or Papal Document or a quote from Catechism. You will appreciate my two-fold selection!

DECREE  
DUBLIN  
AND CANONIZATION  
OF THE  
SERVANT OF GOD  
CATHERINE McAULEY  
FOUNDRRESS  
OF THE  
CONGREGATION OF SISTERS OF MERCY  
QUERY

This Schema as it is called, was requested by the Congregation for Causes to be compiled by me. It was translated into Latin by Fr. Martin Nolan, O.S.A., Postulator, and was the basis for the Decree of Heroic Virtue... with compliments.  
Sr. M. Angela Bolster

Is it agreed that the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity - towards God and towards neighbour - as also the Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude, are shown below to have been practised in an heroic degree.

Christ reveals God as 'rich in Mercy' [Eph. 2:4]. He makes Mercy one of the principal themes of his preaching, and he proclaimed by his actions even more than his words that call to Mercy which is one of the essential elements of the Gospel ethos. Mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the Messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of his mission. Through Mercy, the Messiah becomes a particularly clear sign of the God who is love. [Dives in Misericordia, 2].

Catherine McAuley's love of prayer and example, with her vision of apostolic service in Mercy is spelled out in her Rule: 'MERCY - the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who desire to follow Him - has, in all ages of the

Church, excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor - as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master who has said 'Amen, I say to you; as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me'. (Rule, Art. 8).

Through the Congregation which she established in 1831 Catherine set before herself the exercise of mercy in various expressions to the poor, the homeless, the unprotected and the ignorant of her day. Thus was born the flexible apostolate which in our own days impels her Sisters towards the needy Christ in the world, more particularly in the poor at the cutting-edge of the Church's programme of evangelization in the modern world (c.f. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 6, 17, 44, 46).

From a very early age Catherine McAuley took as her model 'the humbled, abandoned, agonising Christ: this is my Christ. Him will I have and hold; outside of Him, nothing.' Thus it was that for His sake, in faith and love, she built her House of Mercy, the walls of which - to borrow a phrase from St. Augustine - were walls of hope. 'We have ever relied largely on Providence and shall continue to do so': these words of 24 September 1841 are a summary of Catherine McAuley's unshakable confidence in God.

The Servant of God was born in Dublin on 29 September 1778 when Ireland still groaned under penal legislation. Her father was a devout and well-to-do Catholic gentleman; her mother a gracious lady lacking any strong religious convictions. From her father she imbibed her early piety, her vibrant faith and her concern for the poor. His death in 1783 opened a period of suffering and persecution for Catherine who was thereafter brought up in a non-Catholic environment which enticed her mother, her sister and brother from the Church. For about forty years - from 1783 to 1822- Catherine was deprived of the support of Catholic family life except for a brief period in 1798 when she lived with her maternal uncle.

Forced to read non-Catholic books, she sought advice in presbytery and confession-al, she began to practice her religion openly and to initiate a Mercy ministry of education, visitation of the sick and the protection of young women, notwithstanding the disapproval of her guardians, William and Catherine Callaghan, who refused to allow 'popish emblems' in their home.

These were the years of the 'hidden life' of the Servant of God, who nevertheless could see the Cross of Christ in the panels of her bedroom door and prayed thus to her 'humbled, abandoned, agonising Christ'. In time her example won conversion for the Callaghans and in the year 1822 Catherine McAuley became unconditional heiress to William Callaghan's substantial fortune of £25,000.00 sterling.

She accepted this as a trust and, with the approval of Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin she built a house in Baggot Street, Dublin, where poor children would be educated, orphans housed and young women trained for employment. Baggot Street House

was opened on 24 September 1827, Feast of Our Lady of Mercy; hence its name, House of Mercy. Catherine took up residence there in the following year. By that time she had added home and hospital visitation, cared of the aged, instruction of adults and a variety of social services to her commitments, all of which were undertaken in a spirit of evangelization.

The life-style of daily Mass, devotions to the Sacred Heart, Passion, Eucharist and Blessed Virgin, together with biblical and patristic readings, common life and uniformity of dress, brought Catherine and her associates closer to the threshold of the sanctuary.

On 29 May 1829 Pope Pius VIII accorded a Rescript of Indulgences and the Beneplacitum of the Holy See to the new Institute. In the following month the Servant of God was erroneously informed that the archbishop intended to hand over the institute to a religious congregation, merely allowing her to retain the privileges of a benefactress. She submitted with humility and was equally submissive when the archbishop decreed that her work required canonical status. This submission indicates the regard with which the Servant of God respected both the discipline and doctrine of the Church. Conventual life had not formed any part of Catherine's plan.

In the year 1830 she and two companions underwent an austere novitiate. She was professed on 12 December 1831 and was then in her 54th year. Her special Vow Formula, approved by Archbishop Murray, contained a Fourth Vow, viz., 'service of the poor, sick and ignorant'.

Ten years and fourteen foundations later (with four more in petto), on 11 November 1841, the Servant of God died the death of the just which is precious in the sight of the Lord. She was laid to rest in the new cemetery in Baggot Street.

The Decretum Laudis, granting approval to Catherine's two special Mercy Chapters of her Rule, was issued on 24 March 1835. The decree approving the entire Rule was promulgated by Pope Gregory XVI on 5 July 1841.

In her Rule Catherine wished to combine contemplation with apostolic love; she thus earned for herself an unique role in the historical development of apostolic religious congregations. Her theocentric vision is again explained in her letter of 20 December 1840: 'We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can remain always in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back'. Likewise, she counselled, that 'even in the midst of a city, engaged in the most distracting occupations, a Religious must withdraw herself from all created objects and live to God alone in solitude'. [Retreat Instructions, p. 46].

Throughout her life the Servant of God gave courageous witness to her faith; this faith, constantly fought for, understood and appreciated, was an integral part of a

personality.

The circumstances by which the Servant of God strengthened her faith contributed equally to her steadfast hope, her filial submission to the will of God and her awareness of His providence at work in her life. Her life was rooted in an inflexible confidence in God. Indeed, the sentiments of her Suscipe portray the heroic quality of her hope that 'when we give ourselves entirely into the Hands of God, He will sweetly ordain things for our greater comfort, even in this life'.

Her Sisters and contemporaries affirm that charity was the favourite virtue of the Servant of God. The ideal for which she strove was, in fact, the perfection of charity: 'Let charity be our badge of honour. . . so that it may be said there is in us but one heart and one soul in God. . . having His glory and our own sanctification ever in view'.

Her love of God expressed itself in love towards all, especially the poor, whose plight she sought to alleviate, and in whose regard she would prefer to be cold and hungry than that they should be deprived of necessities.

The Servant of God showed herself equally heroic in the practice of the Cardinal Virtues and Evangelical Counsels as in her portrayal of the Theological Virtues. Of her it was said that 'a more zealous, a more prudent, a more successful benefactress of human nature never existed in Ireland since the days of St. Brigid'. Her sense of what was needed showed her prudence - in governing, in her response to crises 'from within and without', in her exercise of authority as a service of love, in her encounters with some clerics who created difficulties for her, and in her sensitivity towards the poor.

Justice was that quality in her which gave God His rightful place in her life and led her to recognise in the miseries of her time the starting-point for dealing with them. Her concern for social justice impelled her to provide for the poor those essential services of teaching, catechising, nursing and training not otherwise available in her time. 'The poor', she said, 'need help today, not next week'.

The fortitude of the Servant of God was shown in her foundation journeys, in her offer to undertake a distant mission in Nova Scotia, and in initiating an auspicious mission of Mercy in pre-Emancipation Ireland. In the same way, she offered her Sisters an outstanding example of temperance.

The humility of the Servant of God is seen especially in the manner in which she committed herself into the hands of God, referring all things to Him and insisting that 'all I wanted was to help the poor since that seemed to be what God was asking of me. If the Order is my work, the sooner it falls to the ground, the better; if it is God's work, it needs no one'.

The Servant of God was faithful in heroic degree to her vows. She insisted that poverty should be the coping-stone of all her Convents of Mercy. Her option for the poor entailed that she and her Sisters should witness to actual poverty as well as to poverty of spirit. Her chastity shone forth in her total dedication to God, in her simplicity of life-style and in her facility for spiritualising friendships.

Finally, the Servant of God was invariably obedient to the Divine Will and showed exceptional openness in her relations with the ecclesiastical authorities of her day. Thus her heroic obedience to the Church's Magisterium enabled her to develop in the way God wanted for her and to experience in her own person the words enshrined in her Rule that 'the Congregation is founded on Calvary, there to serve a Crucified Redeemer, after whose example the Sisters should crucify their senses, imaginations and caprices for the love of their Divine Master'. [Art. 145].

The spirituality of the Servant of God was original in being rooted in Scripture and tradition, in its synthesis of contemplation and action, and it grew from the Foundress' own experience of the infinite goodness, mercy and power of God.

The fama sanctitatis of the Servant of God which was apparent during her life, persisted after her death, until in time - certain difficulties having been overcome - members of the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy petitioned that her Cause for Beatification be introduced. Consequently, on 1 September 1975 His Excellency, the Most Reverend Dermot Ryan, Archbishop of Dublin, set up an Historical Commission in order that the writings and all details of the life of the Servant of God would be documented according to established norms. This being done, a Diocesan Tribunal was convened on 14 December 1978. In due course, all documents assembled were lodged with the Congregation for Causes; this Congregation, having had all documentation examined, gave permission for the compilation of a critical Positio. This ample Positio super virtutibus of the Servant of God was officially published in January 1986 and was unanimously approved by historical Consultors in May of that year.

Subsequently, at the request of Father Martin Nolan, OSA., Postulator for this Cause, theological consultors were nominated; they presented their unanimous verdict on 25 April 1989 in a Particular Assembly [Congresso], under the presidency of the Very Rev. Antonio Petti, Promotor General of the Faith. Later, on 13 March 1990, in an Ordinary Congregation of Cardinals and Bishops, under the presidency of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Caprio, an affirmative answer was given to the question [dubio] as to whether it was agreed that the Servant of God practised virtue in an heroic degree.

Later, when the foregoing deliberations were presented to the Holy Father, John Paul II, happily reigning, His Holiness, considering the vote of the Congregation [assembly] recommended that the Decree of Heroic Virtue of the Servant of God

be published.

This having been done according to established procedure, the Holy Father, in assembly with the Cardinals under the presidency of Cardinal Joseph Caprio, Prefect [Congregation for Causes of Saints], and all others concurring, decreed as follows:

That Catherine McAuley, Servant of God, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, is adjudged to have practised in heroic degree the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity - towards God and towards neighbour - as also the Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude.

The Holy Father then ordered that the foregoing Decree be published and recorded in the Acta of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Dated, Rome, 9 April 1990

ANGELUS Cardinal Felici, Prefect

+ Edward Nowak, Titular Archbishop of Lunensis, Secretary