

MERCY SPIRITUALITY AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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For those who live in religiously pluralistic cultures and for those who experience the Mercy spirituality and ethos bequeathed by the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, it is beneficial to discover within her personal history a prototype of religious tolerance and ecumenism.¹ This paper aims to explore Catherine's experience of Interfaith Dialogue and to examine its influence on Mercy Spirituality.

Catholic-Protestant relations in Ireland

Catherine McAuley was born in Dublin, Ireland, in September, 1778, at a time when interfaith relations between Catholics and Protestants were very fraught. English victories in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland between 1639 and 1651 had strengthened Anglican rule. A conflict between the Dutch-born Protestant William of Orange and the Catholic King James II arose over who would be King of England, Scotland and Ireland. James had abandoned Anglicanism for Catholicism so the English Parliament appealed to William of Orange to save England from a Catholic takeover.² The conflict ended with William's army defeating the army of James at the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland in 1690, thus solidifying Anglican rule in Ireland. Land owned by Catholics was confiscated, so much so that by the end of the century "almost all the land of Ireland was in the hands of new comers, and the old landowning class, the [Catholic] Old English and native Irish gentry and aristocracy, were dispossessed".³ The original Catholic occupiers were often forced to move to inferior lands known as bogs.⁴ Catholics and dissenters had to pay excessive rents and tithes to contribute to the upkeep of the established church⁵ and Catholics were barred from the professions, public office and voting.⁶

Despite the post-war Treaty of Limerick in 1691, penal laws were established by the Anglican ruling class in Ireland. The penal code which was enacted against Catholics "was designed essentially not to punish Catholics for their beliefs, nor to convert them to any form of Protestantism, but to prevent them from obtaining, as a group, property, position, influence or power".⁷ Interreligious conflict in Ireland was therefore more a matter of social class than of religious differences. Inter-marriage was frowned on, not for religious reasons, but because Protestants perceived that they were marrying below their class. However, a cooperative venture between Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters began with the founding of the Society of United Irishmen in 1791 when Catherine was 13 years of age. Their hope was for "an international 'brotherhood of affection' and for the inauguration of an Irish 'fellowship of freedom' " ⁸ and its aim was to remove English control from its affairs. This culminated in a bloody rebellion in 1798 when Catherine was 20. The rebellion failed and resulted in the 1801 Act of Union which saw the end of the Irish parliament and brought

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¹ Janet Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection," *The MAST Journal* 8:1 (1997): 36.

² *William 111 and Mary 11 (1689-1702)*. Accessed May 7, 2012.

<http://www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/mon51.html>

³ Liam De Paor, (1971). *Divided Ulster 2nd* ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 16.

⁴ Frank Murphy (ed.), *The Bog Irish*. (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1987), 2-3.

⁵ De Paor, *Divided Ulster*, 20.

⁶ Murphy, *The Bog Irish*, 3.

⁷ De Paor, *Divided Ulster*, 17.

⁸ Thomas Bartlett, (2011, 17 Feb). *The 1798 Irish Rebellion* (2011), accessed May 7, 2012.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/irish_reb_01.shtml.

Ireland even more tightly under British control.⁹ The British government used religious difference as a political tool and the ‘brotherhood of affection’ ended with increased sectarian bitterness.

The Protestant Orange movement (named after Protestant William of Orange) had been founded in Northern Ireland in 1796 when Catherine McAuley was about 18 years old. It was strongly linked to British unionism and Catholics were banned from joining. Armed and financed by Britain, the Unionist leaders carried out bloody pogroms to try to establish their state of Northern Ireland. Efforts by Catholics both inside and outside Parliament were unsuccessful in redressing their grievances.¹⁰

Catherine McAuley grew up in this difficult religious and social context.

Catherine McAuley’s early interaction with Protestants

Catherine’s father died in 1783 when she was just five years old, and her family moved to share accommodation in a house of a Protestant woman, Mrs George. Here their sense of Catholicity weakened and when Catherine’s mother died and she and her siblings were put in the care of some Protestant friends, her sister and brother who were teenagers relinquished their Catholic faith.¹¹

Sr. Clare Moore in the Bermondsey Manuscript says that “the young Catherine alone remained firm and unshaken amidst the greatest temptations”¹² but Sr. Vincent Harnett in the Limerick Manuscript says that “a Protestant she was not, but yet she could scarcely be called a Catholic” and that she grew up without any settled religious opinions.¹³ After the early 1800s she had begun to drift away from observable Catholic practice.¹⁴ Sr. Vincent adds that Catherine had sincere regard and affection for William Armstrong and his family (who were Protestants and somewhat bigoted¹⁵) with whom she lived, and tried to join them in their religion by reading their books and having discussions with them. However, the more she read and studied the more doubts she had, and she could not in conscience embrace Protestantism, so she turned her mind to the consideration of Catholic doctrines.¹⁶ In about 1810, two priests, Thomas Betagh and Daniel Murray, gave her instruction and support and she “began to renew and deepen the external expressions of her Catholic faith”.¹⁷ However, Catherine’s personal religious search did allow her to understand other faiths and develop an awareness and appreciation of their views and values. On the other hand, looking at Protestantism with an open mind and choosing her own path cemented her Catholic faith later in life and the conviction she had in it.¹⁸

Catherine’s commitment to Catholicism led her to bring her sister, Mary, back to the Church during her last illness. Mary had married a staunch Presbyterian Protestant (also with the surname Macauley) who was very anti-Catholic, so Catherine managed to secretly arrange for Mary and one

⁹ Bartlett, *The 1798 Irish Rebellion*.

¹⁰ *Book Description: Northern Ireland: The Orange State by Michael Farrell*, accessed May 7, 2012.

<http://www.amazon.com/Northern-Ireland-The-Orange-State/dp/0861043006>.

¹¹ Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press and Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 99.

¹² Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 100.

¹³ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 141.

¹⁴ Mary C. Sullivan, (Ed). *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, and Baltimore: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 57.

¹⁵ Mary C. Sullivan, “Welcoming the Stranger: The Kenosis of Catherine McAuley,” *The Mast Journal*, 6:3 (1996), 13.

¹⁶ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 141.

¹⁷ Sullivan, *The Correspondence*, 57; and Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 139-144.

¹⁸ Reflection notes of participants in the Mercy Professional Learning Group workshop at Sacred Heart College, Geelong, Australia, on May 16, 2012, (May 20, 2012).

of her daughters to be reconciled to Catholicism. Catherine had been staying with Mary and her husband to help look after their children. When she told her brother-in-law, Dr. Macauley, after Mary's death that she had died a Catholic, he erupted in a paroxysm of fury and it is said he went to find a dagger. Fearing his violent reaction, Catherine fled into the night and had to find shelter with a friend. Later when he apologised, they were reconciled and she returned to keep on looking after his children.¹⁹

Catherine's experience with Quakers

Catherine lived for some twenty years with Catherine and William Callaghan in Coolock House which was a twenty-two acre estate in northeast Dublin. The wealthy Callaghans had bought it in 1809 shortly after they returned from living in India where they had made their fortune. The Callaghans were known as Quakers although they may not have enjoyed full Quaker membership, and they occasionally attended a Protestant church.²⁰ Catherine was exploring her Catholicism and went secretly - so as not to offend the Callaghans - for instructions from Fr. Murray who prepared her for receiving the Sacraments. When she told the Callaghans about this, they were disappointed, but as Sr. Vincent Harnett explains, "they were unwilling to exert even the smallest influence, and allowed her the same freedom of choice in the matter of religion, which in similar circumstances they would have desired for themselves. She continued to go to Mass and they to church without any diminution of their mutual esteem and affection".²¹ Catherine and the Callaghans were living out a model of interfaith dialogue.

One of the effects of interacting with faith traditions other than one's own can be that change, influence and personal transformation occur. This was the case with Catherine. Ruffing (1997) describes some points of interconnection between the Quaker and Christian traditions. They shared the same Scripture and desire to imitate Jesus, and the Quakers recognized the authenticity of the Catholic mystical tradition. The Quakers also recognized the working of what they called the Inner Light (the indwelling Spirit) in all people regardless of their particular religious traditions, experienced in deep interior, silent prayer. Another Quaker tradition was a ministry of visiting local Quaker meetings and individual families to give support and share prayer. They also extended help to people outside their own community, for example by helping people in desperate need during the Great Famine.²² Ruffing shows how these Quaker traditions influenced Catherine. They were found in her love of Scripture and imitation of Jesus Christ, her deep interior silent prayer, and her practice of visiting the poor, as well as her later practice of visitation of her own Sisters in her newly founded communities. Her practices became a model for her Sisters of visiting people for conversation, prayer, and a practical response to need.²³

Many other experiences influenced Catherine's spirituality and practices; however Ruffing finds that "the most stunning direct influence on her of Quaker concern for the poor was the Lancastrian educational system [of] Joseph Lancaster (1778-1839) [who] pioneered a method of education in the slums of London".²⁴ This was a system of 'pupil teachers' that Catherine used in her schools. Another lesson Catherine took from the Quakers was their care to omit all sectarian themes from the tracts they wrote, in order that their distribution would not be proscribed by the Catholics or the Anglicans. As Ruffing says, "Catherine used the same genre creatively as a catechetical tool".²⁵

¹⁹ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 154-155.

²⁰ Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection", 38, 44.

²¹ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 143.

²² Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection", 39-40.

²³ Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection", 39-40.

²⁴ Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection", 43.

²⁵ Ruffing, "Catherine McAuley's Quaker Connection", 41.

While Catherine was enriched by her interaction with the Quakers, she remained committed to her own faith and worked towards the conversion of the Callaghans to Catholicism. Catherine Callaghan agreed to see Fr. Michael Keogh shortly before her death, but died before she could receive Baptism. William Callaghan, who survived her by three years, was received into the Church. Catherine's reasons for this echo the Catholic beliefs of the day that salvation came only through the Catholic Church. She said to William Callaghan on his sickbed, "I do indeed think you are in danger...but it is not the state of your health which troubles me so much, it is the peril of your immortal soul, which I believe to be endangered by your dying in any other than the Roman Catholic Church".²⁶ This reflected the mindset of the day.

Catherine and the Crottyite schism

Two Catholic priests, cousins Michael and William Crotty, instigated a 20 year schism and by 1840 had caused considerable turmoil in Birr. The Catholic population took sides in the long-running and bitter disagreement between the Crottyes and the parish priest as well as the Bishop. They eventually split from the Catholic Church, leaving the Catholic people who had been drawn to the ministry of the priests feeling vulnerable and divided.²⁷ It was some of these wounds that some people thought the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy might assuage, if not altogether heal. Although the situation was very delicate, Catherine established a foundation in Birr in 1840 to minister to the Crottyites and to offer mercy and reconciliation through visitation and education.²⁸ As Sr. Pius O'Brien puts it, the Sisters' approach was to "go out among the people to win them back to the Church...gently but firmly persuading them of the error their ways".²⁹

Catherine's attitude is expressed in a letter: "It is reported that Crotty is getting several preachers to Birr, to recover some of his congregation stolen by the Sisters of Mercy. Thank God, the poor deluded souls are returning fast – and preparing to approach the Holy Sacraments".³⁰ Along with her approbation of this activity by her Sisters, she also reveals the caution needed in this religiously and politically fraught situation: "Little Sr. M. Teresa is following them everywhere and begs we will unite in the 30 day prayer during April for the conversion of the apostate leader – I must write to moderate her zeal – I am really afraid she would speak to him if they met in any poor place which would be exceedingly wrong".³¹ Sullivan explains Catherine's attitude to the Crottyites in this way: "her decisions not to accept what was different were based solely on fidelity to receiving and extending the mercy of God".³² She did not accept their beliefs but she waded through mud and snow to visit them. When she could not accept beliefs that seemed to be against her own religious convictions, she tried to accept the people holding those beliefs, "appealing to that deeper unity of God's love which embraces all people".³³

Baggot Street

Catherine's difficulties with Protestants appeared from the beginning of her work at Baggot Street. She declared that she had difficulty in obtaining the property because wealthy Protestants in the

²⁶ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 145-146.

²⁷ Sullivan *The Correspondence*, 340.

²⁸ *Catherine's Response*, accessed from

http://www.ahs.qld.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=99&Itemid=117.

²⁹ Pius O'Brien, *Sister Aloysius Scott*, accessed from

<http://www.mercyworld.org/heritage/tmpl-foundressstory.cfm?loadref=190>.

³⁰ Sullivan, *The Correspondence*, 380.

³¹ Sullivan, "March 31, 1841 Letter to Sr. M. Teresa White" in *The Correspondence*, 380.

³² Sullivan, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 16.

³³ Sullivan, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 17.

neighbourhood were opposed to it. They feared that a house for the poor would injure the locality.³⁴ She wrote of her difficulties in a letter in 1883:

It is the first Convent (Baggot St) that was erected in the midst of the Protestant nobility – when they were employing wealth and influence to allure Catholics from their faith...Of the distressed women [lodged and supported at the House of Mercy, Baggot St], seven hundred and seventy two have been instructed and protected, most of whom would have fallen victims to the Proselytising system – and several hundred children have partaken of the Holy Sacraments, who were all under Protestant influence in this neighbourhood. By the visitation of the sick, the poor are rescued from the dangerous interference of false teachers, at the awful period of death.

The benefit effected by this establishment is most remarkable and generally admitted. It has restrained the new lights in their attempts to pervert Catholic servants - who regard it (House of Mercy) as a kind of tribunal, always ready to receive their complaints, and redress their wrongs – and from the liberal Protestant, tribute of approbation have been received. ...I am quite convinced...that if Houses of such general relief were spread through the country, all efforts to delude would – with the blessing of God – be entirely defeated.³⁵

This again shows the Catholic thinking at that time, typified later in the 1863 encyclical, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore: On Promotion of False Doctrine* which states that “well known is the Catholic teaching that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church”.³⁶ Catherine lived at a time before the appearance of the great papal social encyclicals and other documents which influenced Catholics on social justice issues and matters of interfaith dialogue, for example, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (1965) of Vatican 11, which gives “a wonderful model of how people can keep their own beliefs and traditions and be open to dialogue with people of other cultures, traditions and faiths”.³⁷ Catherine did, however, distinguish between proselytising and evangelising. One reflection on Catherine’s approach defines the difference as: “proselytising is converting people to a religion based on force, where a person may not necessarily have a choice. They may feel bound to convert out of duty, for example. Evangelisation is preaching the Good News, and showing it in everyday actions, allowing people to have a genuine change of heart, and giving them the freedom to choose ... [Catherine] tried to evangelise people to her faith by her acts of love and kindness”.³⁸

Catherine’s interfaith attitudes

Sullivan traces Catherine’s empathy for strangers, for ‘those out of their cultural homes,’ to her own experiences as a stranger having to live in the homes of others with religious views different from her own.³⁹ She knew what it was like to be different. Welcoming the stranger became a major theme in her life and ministry; however Sullivan says that her primary motivation for this was “her religious conviction about the living presence of Christ” rather than her personal experiences.⁴⁰

³⁴ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition*, 102.

³⁵ Dec 8, 1833 Letter to Rev. John Rice OSA in Sullivan, *The Correspondence*, 55.

³⁶ *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore: On Promotion of False Doctrines*, accessed from <http://saints.sqpn.com/pope0255d.htm> and <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quanto.htm>.

³⁷ Debbie Weissman, “Religion Should be Seen as Part of the Solution not Part of the Problem,” *Catholic Communications, Sydney Archdiocese* (May 8, 2012), accessed May 14th, 2012. http://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest_news/2012/201258_332.shtml.

³⁸ Reflection notes of participants in the Mercy Professional Learning Group workshop at Sacred Heart College, Geelong, Australia, on May 16, 2012, (May 20, 2012).

³⁹ Sullivan, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 13.

⁴⁰ Sullivan, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 13.

Catherine experienced some of the violence of religious bigotry particularly from her brother-in-law. Ruffing says however, that while responding in a non-violent way, Catherine “does not appear to reflect on the interrelationships among all the factors involved” and that she did not develop any form of social analysis or social criticism of the causes of the human misery she sought to alleviate, something the Quakers were beginning to do.⁴¹ However she was able to negotiate her way across the Catholic-Protestant divisions in the Ireland and England of her time. What she did do was to ‘welcome the stranger’ without necessarily welcoming the stranger’s faith. While limited by the Catholic theology of the day, she was still able to transcend doctrinal differences and inter-religious bigotry and be the mercy of God to anyone in need, and in this way she provides us with a model of interfaith dialogue that can guide our thinking today. Ruffing wonders if what we say about interfaith connections and influences on Catherine may be an imaginative leap that says more about us than Catherine, and she concludes with the observation that “it may say more about what we are becoming than about how Catherine understood her own situation”.⁴²

What we are becoming can be informed and enriched by Catherine’s Mercy spirituality of prayer and Scripture, compassion and acceptance, care and empowerment.

Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Institutions and Interfaith Dialogue

The aim of many interfaith dialogue groups is to promote mutual understanding, respect and cooperation in order to bring about the harmony that promotes justice, peace, development and enrichment. In interfaith interaction, mutual transformation can occur. A specific Interfaith Dialogue ministry among Sisters of Mercy and Mercy institutions is in its early stages, but interfaith interaction is a part of life – the dialogue of everyday life – of many Sisters and Mercy-inspired people, and part of Mercy ministries. People of different faiths encounter the Mercy of God through Mercy ministries for refugees, asylum seekers and other marginalized and displaced people, and through ministries in schools and hospitals, pastoral support, welfare, advocacy, aged care and other institutions and ministries. There is a Mercy presence among participants in interfaith dialogue networks, conferences⁴³ and academic studies. In multicultural Australia where religions can dialogue in peace, there is a rich opportunity to work together to ‘make all things new’ and give hope to a world that does not always experience peace.

The evolving Mercy theology and spirituality of interfaith dialogue is expressed in the Constitutions of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea:

*We learn also from the religious and spiritual traditions of other cultures,
engaging in inter-cultural and multi-faith dialogue where possible.
We recognize God’s spirit within them.
We respect them for their integrity
and wisdom,
and ways to the spirit.*⁴⁴

As Brennan puts it, “there is a new challenge here for us (especially in light of our Mercy tradition of hospitality) to establish meaningful relationships with these stranger-friends which will enable mutual understanding of our diverse beliefs”.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ruffing, Catherine McAuley’s Quaker Connection, 42.

⁴² Ruffing, Catherine McAuley’s Quaker Connection, 44.

⁴³ Some 40 Sisters of Mercy attended the 2009 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Melbourne, Australia, three of whom gave a number of presentations.

⁴⁴ Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, *Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea* (2011), no. 4.07.

Interfaith dialogue and education

According to Blundell, in Australia which is a multi-cultural and multi-faith country, religious pluralism is the context in which we live and work.⁴⁶ The Muslim community for example is one of the fastest growing religious communities in Australia, nearly doubling between 1996 and 2001 to 282,000 and increasing to 340,392 in 2006.⁴⁷ It is the third largest religious community after Christians and Buddhists. Research has shown that many Australians have negative perceptions of Muslims and know little about them.⁴⁸ A study of 1000 year 11 students in Australia revealed that “non-Muslim students do not perceive their own ignorance as the main difficulty facing Muslims in society”.⁴⁹ Ata and Windle (2007) who conducted the survey concluded that schools need to improve the education of their students about Australian society and the world; that schools have a responsibility to educate students about intercultural relations; and that students need to be equipped to engage in political and social discussion particularly about stereotypes and sources of religious and social conflict.⁵⁰ Blundell says that “what we need is multi-faith literacy to be able to engage in serious interfaith dialogue and create opportunities for interfaith cooperation at a deeper level”.⁵¹

The discourse on interfaith education also addresses the difficulties of educators from the dominant culture essentialising and misrepresenting the perspectives of the ‘other’. It is not that they do not know what the other knows, they know it differently.⁵² Byrne suggests that interfaith educative aims can be undermined without critical analysis and recommends that resources and training programmes should be interfaith-authored and reviewed.⁵³

Byrne uses the educational pedagogy of Paulo Freire to advocate positive pluralism and diversity as an educative tool, based on the premise of the individual’s right to liberty of belief.⁵⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the discourse of pluralism as a stance to take in interfaith dialogue. However, what Freire does offer is an insight into the process of transformation that can take place in individuals and groups engaging in interfaith dialogue. He says that it is about “knowing that I am learning to be who I am by relating to what is my opposite”.⁵⁵ Freire believes that “exploration of otherness is part of the journey to knowing self.”⁵⁶ It is self-reflection as part of the

⁴⁵ Bonnie Brennan, “History of the Sisters of Mercy of Ireland in terms of the Ministry of Spirituality”. In *Fire Cast on the earth – Kindling: Being Mercy in the twenty-first Century*. International Mercy Research Conference, Burlingame, California, November 9-13, 2007.

⁴⁶ Patricia Blundell, “Religious Literacy for a Multi-faith World,” *Living Mercy: Past, Present and Future Conference* (21-23 September, 2011). Brisbane, accessed May 11, 2012.
<http://www.livingmercy.org.au/pdf/WorkshopsandPapers.pdf>

⁴⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *3416.0 - Perspectives on Migrants 2007*, accessed May 11, 2012.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main%20Features22007?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3416.0&issue=2007&num=&view=.> (25/02/2008).

⁴⁸ Aba Ata and Joel Windle. “The Role of Australian Schools in Educating Students about Islam and Muslims.” *AQ: Australian Quarterly* 79:6 (2007): 19.

⁴⁹ Ata and Windle, “The Role of Australian Schools,” 27.

⁵⁰ Ata and Windle, “The Role of Australian Schools,” 27.

⁵¹ Blundell, “Religious Literacy.”

⁵² Cathy Byrne, “Freirean critical pedagogy’s challenge to interfaith education: what is interfaith? What is education?” *British Journal of Religious Education* 33:1 (2011): 50.

⁵³ Byrne, “Freirean critical pedagogy,” 57.

⁵⁴ Byrne, “Freirean critical pedagogy,” 55.

⁵⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics democracy and civic courage*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 119.

⁵⁶ Byrne, “Freirean critical pedagogy,” 56.

pedagogy of interfaith dialogue and a stepping outside the known without fear of losing faith.⁵⁷ As Puett puts it, 'the ultimate task of interfaith educators is cultivating and sustaining social cohesion and a culture of peace'.⁵⁸

The challenge for educational institutions is to promote Interfaith Dialogue 'literacy' in teachers and students through imparting knowledge, developing interfaith relationships and cooperation, and facilitating enriching self-transformation through this praxis. For Mercy institutions, the challenge is how to engage with the evolving Mercy spirituality of Interfaith Dialogue so that it informs both teacher and student in this journey of knowledge, cooperative relationships and personal transformation.

Conclusion

The Mercy spirituality of Interfaith Dialogue is an evolving response to the changing reality of a multicultural, multifaith world. As we live in and interact with this changing world and reflect on our response to it, we can look to Catherine McAuley to help us find ways to achieve 'soft peace':

*Sweet mercy! Soothing, patient, mild and
kind,
Softens the high and lifts the fallen mind,
Knows with soft rein and even hand to guide;
Nor yields to fear, nor knows exacting pride,
Not soon provoked, it easily forgives,
Is all to all, and with a look relieves,
Soft peace it brings wherever it arrives,
Removes our pains, and crowns with peace
our lives.⁵⁹*

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⁵⁷ Byrne, "Freirean critical pedagogy," 56.

⁵⁸ Cited in Byrne, "Freirean critical pedagogy," 57.

⁵⁹ Poem of Catherine McAuley in Mary C. Sullivan, *The Practical sayings of Catherine McAuley: A reprint of Mary Clare Moore (1868). A Little Book of Practical Saying, Advices and Prayers of Mary Catherine McAuley*. (New York: Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2010), 37-38.

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