

The theme of the Conference is the quote from Catherine McAuley: “ The blessing of unity dwelling amongst us is the true spirit of Mercy flowing on us.”

The need for a vital paradigm shift in the education of girls in particular and education generally in Australasia.

In this presentation I will be sharing insights that lead me to suggest strongly that a radical paradigm shift is needed in the education of girls and women in Australasia and that Mercy schools are well situated to lead the way in this matter.

I am inspired to suggest this paradigm shift by many women that I have met across the centuries in my study of women’s history and by Catherine McAuley, our foundress, in particular.

This paper had its genesis in my participation in the Mercy International Research Conference held in San Francisco in November 2007. The methodology of this conference was essentially that of See, Judge and Act which many of you would be familiar with from the Catholic Action groups YCS, Young Christian Students and YCW, Young Christian Workers. At the San Francisco Conference it was adapted to inform a group theological reflection. This reflection began with a description of the contemporary social situation, which was then subject to an historical contextual analysis, this in turn became the focus of dialogue with the traditions of scripture, ecclesiology, theology and spirituality, leading to proposals of action. It was a small conference with only 26 participants. Each participant was expected to have read every other participant’s paper before the conference. I was one of the invited historians and asked to respond to the social analysis papers from an Australian historical perspective.

After reading these papers, I chose to begin by focusing on the statistics which Elizabeth Davis from Newfoundland, Canada, quoted concerning the proportion of seats held by women in the following parliaments: Canada 20.8%, Australia 24.7%, the United Kingdom 19.7%, the United States 16.3%, the United Nations 9.4%. I made this choice because I thought that, in the last analysis, it was basic to addressing most of the problems highlighted in all the social analysis papers.

While all of these figures are small, among the countries cited, Australia has the greatest percentage of women in parliament at the national level. This is not unexpected since, while NZ was the first country in which women won the right to vote (1893), it was in South Australia in 1894 that women first won the right not only to vote but to be voted for and this ultimately led, after the federation of the Australian states, to Australian women being granted the right to vote and be voted for at the national level.¹

It is well documented that it was initially middle class women who led the agitation for the right to vote and to be voted for in the western world.² It is also well

¹ A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia – A Gift or a Struggle?*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1992, 59 et seq.

² P. Hollis, *Women in Public: The Women’s Movement 1850-1900*, London. Allen& Unwin, 1979.

documented that they were moved to take up this agitation and honed their skills to do this through their social welfare work, which was encouraged by the various religious denominations and nourished, in many of the women, by a strong spirituality.³

The Catholic Church in Australia was divided over the issue of votes for women and women standing for parliament. Cardinal Moran supported it strongly seeing it as women's right; others like Bishop Doyle of Lismore, though stoutly defending the abilities of women, declared that women were not interested in entering the grimy world of politics.⁴ That men are not capable of adequately representing women has also long been argued. Indeed Edith Stein was most insightful in her analysis of the nature of man, the male. She noted from her experience in Germany that women parliamentarians from opposing parties could work together more effectively for the common good than their male confreres.⁵

The Church has long argued that woman must be true to her nature and that integral to this is her call to motherhood and nurturing. Yet, intermingled with such motherhood statements are ones that highlight the ability of women to get things done in the public sphere. Indeed after World War II Pius XII declared: 'If more attention were paid to the anxieties of feminine sentiment, the work of consolidating peace would move ahead more rapidly. Those nations which are well-supplied with the goods of this world would be more hospitable and more generous toward those who are in want. Those in charge of public property would be more cautious in their dealings. With women in charge certainly the organizations set up to take care of community needs in the fields of housing, education, hospitals and employment would get more done and be more foresighted.'⁶ What more could you ask for affirmation of women taking leadership at the national and state level

The Pioneers

Indeed across the centuries there is evidence of men who supported women in various ways, especially with regard to obtaining an education, and who valued women as counselors. On the whole, however, men have resented women assuming power beyond the family. This was the experience of a significant group of women in Australia, many of whom were Catholics, who had worked for the vote. Anxious to promote their social welfare agenda they chose to align themselves with the Labor Party, whose policies they considered resonated most closely with theirs. The Labor men, however, foiled their attempts to become equal members and it was with difficulty that they established what was called the NSW Labor Women's Organising Committee in 1904, the first of its type in Australia and, one could safely say, the world.

On the occasion of their Silver Jubilee this Committee produced a Jubilee brochure in which they recalled: 'Recognition of our worth in the political world was slow within

³ F.K. Prochasta, *Women and Philanthropy*, Oxford, 1980,11; J.Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism*, London, Macmillan, 1985, 73 et seq.

⁴ *The Catholic Press*, 24 May 1902 & 5 April, 1902.

⁵ See E. Stein, *Woman – The Collected Works of Edith Stein* Vol.II, translated by Freda Mary Oben, Washington, ICS Publications, 1987.

⁶ O.M.Liebard, *Official Catholic Teachings: Love and Sexuality*, Wilmington, N.Carolina, McGrath Pub. Co., 1987, 188.

our own (Labor) movement and we were five years working before the Annual Conference (which controls our forces) granted us a Constitution.’ By 1909 the Committee had been recognized as a constitutional portion of the ALP and granted representation at the annual Conference. Indeed on the occasion of the celebration of their Silver Jubilee J.H.Scullin, the Prime Minister of Australia at the time, acknowledged that it was the women who had been largely responsible for the first national success of the Labor Party in 1913 (?). The women recalled: ‘Many days were spent in walking from door to door – a task which oftentimes meant covering a whole electorate in order to place the policy of Labor in the homes of women of the city. In the country our noble band of women went forth with little or no provision made for their comfort.’⁷

The women rejoiced in their achievements: ‘What a reward we have reaped – and how hopeless the task looked when we set out! Without money, and with the whole of the press against us – what a handicap! The overcoming of these handicaps has realised for us full citizen’s rights in all walks of life, the organization of women in every industry, the Early Closing Act, the Minimum Wage Act, the 44 hour working week, shop and factory legislation, the appointment of inspectors to guard awards, old-age and invalid pensions, the Maternity Allowance Act, widows’ pensions and family endowment.” In the mainstream history books the men, especially Jack Lang, are credited with all of these achievements.⁸

The first President, Kate Dwyer, (a dedicated Catholic and member of the NSW Catholic Women’s League), exhorted the women of 1929 in her Silver Jubilee message: ‘As women are the home-makers they should be given every encouragement and scope to become nation builders, for the interests of home and nation are so interwoven one cannot be separated from the other ... Women of the Labor Movement, remember that whilst progressing you must look to securing your rightful place among the councilors and legislators of your country. You have ability, capacity and grit.’⁹

Annie Golding also a dedicated Catholic and a leading pioneer in the campaign to attain the vote for women in Australia declared: ‘...it is fitting that a few remarks should be made by me – one of the pioneers who aided in that strenuous struggle to bring women on to the political horizon. There is no apology needed for them being there. The world sent out a ‘S.O.S’ – and they responded. The only regret is that they are still on the outer rim of political life.’¹⁰

Reinforcing Edith Steins perception of women politicians, it is clear from the history of the 19th and early 20th century women’s movement in the English speaking Western World, that the women activists seeking political power to help heal the ills of society formed a supportive network. The NZ women warned the Australian women, when they were agitating for the vote at the Commonwealth level, not to settle for less than the right to be voted for as well as the right to vote. The NZ women had found that the transition was not an easy one and that though they had

⁷ NSW Labor Women’s Organising Committee, Silver Jubilee Brochure, 1929, 9.

⁸ Ibid. 9.

⁹ Ibid. 10.

¹⁰ NSW Labor Women’s Organising Committee, Silver Jubilee Brochure, 1929, 10.

won the right to vote in 1893 it was not until 1919 that they achieved the right to stand for parliament. And indeed the Australian women were inspired by British and American activists and in turn aided these women in their causes.

Women Into Politics Inc

Despite all the valiant efforts of these pioneer women, their successors in Australia a century later are gravely concerned and took the initiative in 1998 to organize the group Women Into Politics (WIP) Inc. They explained: ‘ Women have had the vote for nearly 100 years. As yet this has not been translated into political power, nor has equal representation been achieved. Women do not have control over public matters which govern their social and economic well-being. Women have little influence on public policy or public decision making on the great matters of the day – on economic management, employment, war and peace, the environment, social welfare measures, foreign affairs or foreign aid. Women continue to rely on the good will of men in high office for their well-being.’¹¹

WIP lamented: ‘Until those in power are persuaded to reform our political institutions, and until women are approximately half of our parliaments and decision makers, Australian women will continue to be lobbyists, not main players.’¹²

It is significant that WIP in the healthy tradition of the pioneer women cooperate across political parties and religious affiliations pointing out “One of the strengths of the (our) organization is that it is accepted as non-partisan by women in and out of the political parties, and we are able to have the benefits of a range of ideas.”¹³

WIP concluded their Report on the eve of the 21st century: ‘The growing discussion of how to both retain or regain civil society and accommodate powerful financial markets, how to do the research that will show that social capital is worthwhile, that social gain can benefit business, will no doubt continue and develop, if only because women recognize the necessity for balance in the world of affairs. We will all have to develop new ways of operating to gain for women what is our right, and perhaps to re-invent old strategies. We still do live in a community, not an economy!’¹⁴

Alas, in its Report (2006-2007), WIP reported: ‘The increase in numbers has slowed ... this has been a cause of frustration to women’s hopes that the influence of women would become more equal..... The number of women on the boards of the top 100 corporations remains abysmally low. Meanwhile the 2006 – 2007 year has seen ongoing decline in standards, as Australian politics grows unashamedly more ruthless, less reliant on merit or on rational argument, research and consultation, and more related to self-interest, caprice and public relations ‘spin’, as it is now called, than to intelligent policy development.’¹⁵

¹¹ <http://www.womenintopolitics.org.au/object.html>

¹² WIP website, Objectives and Rationale, 2.

¹³ WIP website, Annual Report, 1998 – 1999, 1.

¹⁴ WIP Annual Report, 1998 -1999, 3.

¹⁵ WIP, Annual Report 2006 – 2007)

The WIP last Report in 2010 was even more depressing as they explained: “Despite the fact that we have a female Governor-General, a female Prime Minister, a female NSW Governor and a female NSW Premier, the representation of women in Parliaments and on Boards has regressed.” (WIP, Annual Report 2009-2010, see website.)

Just to up-date the situation concerning the problem of too few female members of parliament in Australia, journalist Stephanie Pealting (?) on 7 March 2011 commented in the Sydney Morning Herald):

“There are 254 women in the state and federal parliaments or 30.8% of MPs in the country, according to research to be released tomorrow to mark International Women’s Day”. She also pointed out that “if you keep pre-selecting women into marginal seats it’s harder to get into cabinet because they don’t get the experience. ...Julia Gillard and Nicola Roxan have safe seats so they can expect long careers.” (<http://www.smh.com.au/national/too-few-female-mps-in-australia-not-tomention-NSW-2010>)

A challenging reality

In 2007 I pointed out that a significant development in the saga of promoting the political influence of women in Australian life was the fact that recently two very capable, successful women politicians resigned from the Commonwealth Parliament¹⁶. These were the Federal Parliamentarians: Natasha Stott-Despoja (Democrat) and Jackie Kelly (Liberal, a Monte Sant Angelo Mercy girl). Each said that she needed to spend more time with her family. At the same time the NSW Parliamentarian Carmel Tebutt (Labor, an OLMC Burraneer Mercy girl), declined to take on the responsibility of being Minister for Education, explaining that she needed to spend more time with her small son.

Since that time, the difficulties younger women face, in trying to manage family life and a demanding career in the wider community, is being voiced increasingly in various public forums.

In the Q&A program of 25th February this year in addressing the problem of the glass ceiling preventing women rising to take significant leadership positions in business, feminist activist and author Dr Leslie Cannold pointed out that it was not so much the glass ceiling that created the problem as motherhood.

In fact many women with a family choose to settle for part-time work as the most suitable compromise. This is evident in the 2008 publication of Jane Caro and Catherine Fox titled: *The F Word - How we learned to swear by feminism*, [Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2008] Both these women enjoy their family life and work but declare: “sexual inequality is still frighteningly prevalent ...” (On book cover)

Maggie Hamilton in her 2008 book *What’s Happening to Our Girls* published by Penguin, among other things reported the following from her research:

¹⁶ Federal Parliament: Natasha Stott-Despoja (Democrat), Jackie Kelly (Liberal); NSW Parliament: Carmel Tebbutt (Labor).

“For all the girls I spoke to, even quite young girls, children were a natural part of getting married”. (p248)

“The girls I spoke with liked the idea of being mums for down-to-earth reasons. They wanted the opportunity to be loving and nurturing and have fun with their little ones. They felt that children were extremely important and deserved their time and attention – even if it meant putting their careers on hold.” (p251)

“Many girls saw adults as too stressed and busy and that their lives were fragmented at best.” (p204)

She quoted one girl who declared: “I want to get married and have babies. My mum had me and my brother late. It makes me want to have them earlier, like at 27. My mum regrets having us late.” (p243)

In the first Quarterly Essay of 2008 (?) entitled “Love and Money” with the subtitle “The family and the Free Market”, Anne Manne provided a scholarly and entertaining critique of the devaluing of motherhood. This she held had done feminism few favours. She pointed out that for women on the frontline of our work-centred society, it has made for hard choices. Manne argues that any true definition of equality has to take into account dependency and the care of others.

In the Envy session in Rachel Kohn’s Seven Deadly Sins Series in her regular religious radio programme, “The Spirit of Things”, on 1 November 2010, Jackie Frank said that young women of to-day believe that they can “have it all” but not now, they want to focus on their parenting and do not want the burden they have seen being borne by the previous generation of “have it all now women”. Jackie is the Editor of one of Australia’s highest circulating publications, the *Marie Claire* magazine. She has worked as Fashion Editor on British *Elle*, American *Elle* and *Mademoiselle* magazines.

In the earlier part of this year the ABC Compass programme ran a series called “Iconoclasts”. The one on 13 February 2011 featured Madeleine Albright, the former USA Secretary of State, and Ashley Judd a successful young American actress and a “hands on” activist who works with women in developing countries. The issue of “women can have it all” came up and they agreed from their life histories that “**yes**, but **not all** at the same time.” Ashley Judd added that a woman “must be at peace with the choice she has made.”

The Q&A Programme for International Women’s Day this year (March, 2011) focused on the problem of getting more women on to Boards of Directors. Apart from the “glass ceiling” associated with the reluctance of men to appoint women Janet Albrechtsen, a columnist with *The Australian* raised the issue of the demands of motherhood. She spoke about her friends from school and University who had done really well but wanted to have a family she added “even unlikely girls”!

The Brisbane *Catholic Leader* reported that All Hallows in celebrating International Women’s Day during their year of celebrating 150 years since their foundation from Dublin, invited ex-student Former Queensland chief magistrate Diane Fingleton to be

the guest speaker. Former pupils, media professional Kristin Devitt and barrister Kateena O’Gorman were other speakers on this occasion. Katenna graduated from All Hallows in 1997 and won a Rhodes Scholarship to study law and human rights at Oxford. She practices as a barrister on the Queensland bar. She said that the biggest obstacles for women, revolved around balancing work with family commitments, adding that flexible work arrangements were important for women today. She suggested that transformation in the workplace for better conditions can come from groups of women working together to make change happen. (The Catholic Leader, 13 March, 2011.)

This strain on young mothers trying to balance family life and work is also described in the Sydney University Press 2010 publication called “The Good Mother” edited by Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppertz both from the University’s Faculty of education and social work. It was reviewed in the Sydney University Alumni Magazine by simply SD who obviously was a mother working outside the home and could identify with many of the problems of working mothers described in the book.

The editors observed that it is more likely for the woman with young children to withdraw from the workforce pointing out that: “only 63 per cent of women with children under 15 are employed compared with 92 percent of men with children.” Furthermore they are disproportionately represented in positions of power and authority across occupations.”

When summing up contemporary research the editors revealed that “while higher education and the establishment of a career may have become a normative pattern for women, having children continues to interrupt this trajectory.” The reviewer of the book resonated with what the editors of the book described as “the relentless clash” between a woman realizing her potential as a senior executive and the time taken for mothering and the lack of accommodation of this in all sorts of ways by men employers and men in the workplace. Instead of talking about the “glass ceiling” they referred to “the mummy ceiling”! (p25 SAM Mar 2011)

It is also relevant at this stage to draw attention to the fact that there is much in the news in recent years concerning the problems associated with infertility as well as the problems which arise from women having their babies at a later age as well as the trauma involved with IVF fertility treatments.

Many women, in fact it seems most women, want to have children. On the other hand women are desperately needed in the decision making leadership areas of our country especially in the political field

Relevant historical background

As we look through the historical lens in connection with these developments our attention is drawn to Betty Friedan and her 1963 publication *The Feminine Mystique*. Many women throughout the western world resonated with this seminal publication in which Betty Friedan expressed her growing discontent during the 1950s with the limitations of her narrow domestic world and, as she said, ‘as a wife and mother of

three small children, half-guiltedly I took up again my profession of journalism.’¹⁷ Her thesis in 1963 was: ‘...our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role.’¹⁸ At that time Betty Friedan held that women should not have to choose between marriage and a career it was merely a matter of setting up a new life plan in terms of one’s whole life as a woman.¹⁹

It is most significant that though Betty’s Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* is well known far less well known in her publication *The Second Phase* which assessed with great honesty and insight developments in the women’s movement from 1960 – 1980.

In this later publication Friedan explained that she had gradually become aware that something was ‘off’, ‘out of focus’, ‘going wrong’ in the terms by which the rising generation were trying to live the equality for which she and her associates had fought. She had discovered this as a result of talking to her own sons and daughter and others of their generation whom she had met when lecturing at universities and professional conferences or through feminist networks around USA and the world.

She explained that those who had established the women’s movement had already had their families but young women starting out on promising but demanding careers found that they barely had time to develop a relationship let alone care for a family. Friedan observed that she ‘sensed the exhilaration of “superwomen” giving away to a tiredness, a certain brittle disappointment.’ On the other hand she deplored the fact that many married women were often forced by economic circumstances to work and were not free to have a child.²⁰

Friedan admitted that she and her conferees had been naive; they had not realized the complexity of the task ahead of them. She also lamented that too many women politicians submitted to the male political machinery. But, as she said, what else could they do when they did not have the numbers? She stated: ‘I believe it’s over, that first stage of the women’s movement. And yet the larger revolution, evolution, liberation that the women’s movement set off, has barely begun.’²¹

She declared that ‘the second stage cannot be seen in terms of women alone, our separate personhood or equality with men. The second stage involves coming to terms with the family – new terms with love and with work ...’²²

Betty Friedan summed up the situation: ‘How do we transcend the polarisation between women and women and between women and men to achieve the new wholeness that is the promise of feminism and get on with solving the concrete, practical everyday problems of living, working and loving as equal persons? This is the personal and political business of the second stage.’²³

¹⁷ *The Feminine Mystique*, first published 1963, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1965.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid* 297.

²⁰ B.Friedan, *The Second Stage*, London, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1982, 21, 22, 26 -29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 30 -33.

²² Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 34.

²³ Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 47.

Betty Friedan was even handed in her analysis of the young radical feminists recognising the validity of the insight of the radical feminists that “the personal is political”. But she lamented that ‘many feminists knew from the totality of their own experience that the rhetoric of the radical feminists denied the reality of woman’s own sexuality, her childbearing, her roots and life connection.’²⁴

Sagely, Betty Friedan observed: ‘Although the women’s movement has basically served the interests of life, it has threatened that sex-role polarization, which has been seen as basic to life, to sexuality and indeed identity to some men and even more women. There is a basic energy involved in this polarization, which ultimately serves death, if thwarted in its service of life and growth.’²⁵

Betty Friedan recognized the fear of women which many men have and which damages the relationship between men and women. To illustrate her point she quoted the comment of a West Point man looking for more in life. He had confessed: ‘Men are jealous and afraid of women, maybe envious of their power. It may sound corny but there is power in women’s ability to create life, closeness to life, that men don’t have, always chasing power, in the company, in the army ...’²⁶

Betty Friedan also declared: ‘I believe that “masculine” leadership with its emphasis upon competition and a clear win-lose is not appropriate to the second stage of human liberation. Rather I advocate a leadership style generally perceived as “feminine” but open to use by either men or women. It is based on synthesising intuitive, qualitative thinking and a contextual, relational power style.’ She explained further: ‘I advocate its use because its concern is with presenting the whole picture rather than concentrating on a given task; growth and the quality of life, rather than fixed quantities and the status quo; the sharing of internal resources and the establishment of interdependent adaptive relationships of support.’²⁷

What Now?

It is clear that women can have it all but not all at the same time and that motherhood and politics do not mix well. The practical problem of young mothers trying to balance mothering with political life was highlighted in June 2009 when Senator Sarah Hanson-Young was directed to take her two year old daughter out of the Senate Chamber when the senators gathered for a vote. Sarah is recorded as saying: “What upset me the most was seeing her being upset and not knowing who I was going to hand her to on the other side of the door.” (SMH, Friday June 19, 2009, p.4)

In the world generally and Australia in particular it leaves us still challenged by the words of the pioneer suffrage worker, Annie Golding: ‘... the world has suffered through want of the dual influence. Only the masculine was cultivated. In all lands property, military glory, and lust for power were the highest ideals. The humanizing

²⁴ Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 96, 57.

²⁵ Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 318.

²⁶ Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 167.

²⁷ Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 250.

influences – sentiment, family love, and other domestic virtues – were relegated to an inferior place.²⁸

It was the great old USA suffrage worker, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who stated: “I consider the hey-day of woman’s life is the shady side of fifty, when the vital forces, heretofore expended in other ways, are garnered in the brain, when their thoughts and sentiments flow out in broader channels ...” (p447 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More of Reminiscences, 1815-1897*, Sckocken Books, New York, 1971 ?1871, reprinted from the T.Fisher Unwin edition of 1898)

Closer to home, a shining example of this in our tradition is Catherine McAuley. She was in her 50s when she founded the Sisters of Mercy and, under God, set in train a series of events involving the cooperation of thousands of people, women and men across the world, which, among countless other significant events, has led to us participating in this conference here to-day.

The challenge to us is to establish a new paradigm, which is internalised by women and the wider community, which recognises that, while we prepare the girl children and young women, we look to mature-aged women to take on top leadership roles in the political, social, cultural and business fields. In the light of smaller families in the western world we could probably translate Cady Stanton’s “shady side of 50” to “shady side of 40+”.

In fact, because it is a natural response to women’s life-cycle, it is already happening in Australasia but generally the leadership of the women is in middle management not at the top level where policies are formulated.

There was strong evidence of this recently, when it was reported in *The Catholic Weekly*, 3 April 2011, that the Sydney Catholic Education Office, as part of their honouring of the centenary of International Women’s Day, recognized with a special award sixteen exemplary women for their “years of tireless, selfless work on behalf of Catholic schools and Students”. From the individual profiles of these women it was evident that they were generally in middle management positions. The top executive policy maker of the Catholic Education Office bestowing these honours was a man.

The tremendous potential energy of women in the 40+ bracket was highlighted by ABC broadcaster Geraldine Doogue (an ex-student of Santa Maria I am told) in 2005 at the launch of the book *And the Dance Goes On*, a collection of life stories of inspiring Catholic women, written by Catholic women and initiated by the then Commission for Australian Catholic Women. As a result of reading the book Geraldine declared that there was “a lot of energy in Catholic women” (*The Catholic Leader*, October 30, 2005, p7.)

Of course you cannot just move directly into a top position without adequate background concerning your field of operation but it is generally recognized in education that there are basic skills that are transferable. Indeed, there are many

²⁸ A.Golding, ‘The Evolution of Woman and Her Capabilities’, *Australasian Catholic Congress*, Melbourne, 1904.

implications following from the acceptance of the need to work towards establishing this radical paradigm shift.

The first is to enunciate it clearly and often enough for it to become commonplace in the thinking of parents, teachers and children as the children grow into adulthood. Young women as they are planning their post-school career before marriage will, hopefully, also be planning for their shady-side of 40+ career.

Among the many implications involved in implementing this paradigm shift is giving young married women the confidence to believe in the truth enunciated in 1929 by Kate Dwyer, married, Catholic and dedicated social and political activist, that: "As women are the home-makers they should be given every encouragement and scope to become nation builders, for the interests of home and nation are so interwoven one cannot be separated from the other ..."²⁹ This of course follows from Catherine McAuley's conviction that the education of women was fundamental to the good of society.

A vitally important associated implication is the education of boys as prospective husbands and later associates in various realms with mature aged women. This is worthy of a paper in itself. Boys, young men and older men need to have a clear understanding of how, when and why the mature women's contribution to society, especially in the political field, is crucial to our nation.

There are encouraging signs of the promotion of men in parenting in the family. There is what has been termed "a fatherhood revolution", taking place in Australia. The Perth paper *The Record* reported in 2009: "Australian fatherhood writer and campaigner Warwick Marsh notes a sea change in recent decades in attitudes to fathers and fatherhood." He pointed out numerous signs of the promotion of fatherhood such as Father's Day being celebrated with a renewed sense of vigour and excitement - the media are running father-friendly stories, restaurants are booked out for Father's Day as well as Mother's Day and so on.

Other promising signs are that more men are attending the birth of their children and it is noted that the Tressillian Movement in Australia is now including fathers in the sessions concerning problem babies, which they had previously been given only to the mothers concerned.³⁰

In Conclusion

I have been highlighting the need for society generally to look to mature aged women to take responsibility in the political area of our society and for mature aged women from their childhood to be aware that this type of responsibility could be reasonably expected of them.

It is difficult to highlight one issue without appearing to lessen the importance of other issues and in the last analysis all things are connected. Just as received wisdom

²⁹ Ibid. 10.

³⁰ Added to these 'signs of hope' could be the Men's Shed movement and developments in men's spirituality see David Tacey, *Remaking Men – the revolution in masculinity*, Melbourne, Viking, 1997 and books by Richard Rohr.

has it: “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link” , such is the case in society. A society is only functioning in a life-giving way if intelligent responsibility is being taken at all levels – unless leadership is being exercised at all levels. It is a case of gifts differing. There is a tendency to rank work with the professions at the top but what is the good of having doctors if we do not have responsible garbage collectors and allied preventive health workers such as plumbers and nutritionists.

When this responsible leadership happens at all levels in society, it is as Catherine McAuley stated from experience, and is the theme of this conference: “The blessing of unity dwelling amongst us is the true spirit of Mercy flowing on us”. This is the ideal for any group of people; Mercy and justice are the two sides of the one coin and need to operate at all levels of society.

Implicit in my suggested paradigm shift is a truly Christian theology of work informing a strong, realistic spirituality of Justice and Mercy which undermines the development of a cynical attitude to politics and the mentality of “leaving it to others” and promotes the awareness of the “power of one”, a sense of responsibility and an attitude of cooperation.

It is astounding to think what chronic social problems Catherine McAuley faced in her society and that she had the audacity to attempt to do something practical about them. She gathered around herself an *ad hoc* community which shared her faith and aspirations to various degrees with their own personal idiosyncrasies and she made mistakes herself, yet they made significant progress in relieving the distress of the poor and drawing the middle-class into the process. Realistically sustained by her Faith she could say: “There has been a marked providential guidance, which the want of prudence, vigilance or judgment has not impeded.”

We are faced with the challenge of helping to inform our society with justice and mercy at the political level. From the women’s history we know there have been many women clearly capable of giving valuable service to society at the highest political level. I will finish by sharing with you the profile of such an Australian woman who died recently. Her name is Geraldine Crane. Her friend Pat Mullins published a marvelous obituary of her in *The Catholic Leader* in Brisbane on 6 March, 2011 (p23). Geraldine and Pat were both members of the group called YCW Past Members.

Pat describes Geraldine as an ordinary woman, a wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother and a member of the YCW Past Members Association. She said that she made an extraordinary contribution to the book “Ordinary Young Women doing extraordinary things” published in 1999 and which was not an exercise in nostalgia but an active remembering of what gives energy to the past YCW members now and provides insights for the Church for the future. Geraldine went to school a All Hallows Brisbane where she was introduced to Catholic Action through the YCS, the Young Christian Students Movement. She left school after year 10. This would have been in the late 1940s or early fifties.

Geraldine worked in the State Public Service and later Commonwealth Public Service and she and her friend Pat Mullins both joined the NCGM (National Catholic Girls’ Movement) soon after leaving school. She served twice as group president at Rosalie,

was a member of the diocesan executive from 1955-58, diocesan president in 1958 and a member of the national executive in 1958-59. She was the foundation president of the YCW Past Members Association from 1964-68 before she moved from Brisbane to Canberra.

Pat informs us that “Gerry was always a student. (In other words she was realistic, understanding that education is a life-long process and depends essentially on the initiative of the individual.) She gained her Senior Certificate from evening tutorial classes in 1952 and a Bachelor of Arts from the Australian National University in 1974. She tutored and lectured in sociology at Canberra College of Advanced Education (now University of Canberra) from 1975-85 and worked in the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 1989 until her retirement in 1995.

Pat says that she was friends with Gerry for sixty years and declared that she was throughout her life a person of clear thought and firm arguments, which she supported conclusively with sound and thorough research.

Pat gives us a little cameo picture of the young Gerry in action displaying her natural insightful talents: “On one occasion when we were 17 years old, waiting for a tram at the corner of Barooka and Milton roads, to go to the Thursday-night dance at Cloudland, Gerry was expounding at some length on a subject, during which time she stated confidently, “when we get married...” Since neither of them had boyfriends at this stage Pat expressed her uncertainty concerning this matter and recalls that Gerry responded with a series of statistics something like this, “eighty-nine percent of women are born healthy; seventy-nine percent of all people pass exams; ninety percent of all people find employment; seventy percent of all people get married. Now, I’ve been in the majority percentage so far and I don’t doubt I’ll be in the majority when it comes to getting married!” Pat observed: “And Gerry was right of course – Russell was waiting in the wings!”

Pat concluded her obituary by stating that, to the end, Gerry’s life was informed by the Gospel-based See, Judge and Act methodology, to which she was first introduced at All Hallows, Mercy secondary school.

I think you would agree that Gerry would have made a great politician the shady side of 40+ and would not been at all intimidated or manipulated by the media!

Thank you.