
HISTORY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

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NEWS AND NOTES

CONFERENCE '95

The third assembly to be sponsored by the Conference on the History of Women Religious was held June 18-21, at Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee. Participants who had been at prior conferences--College of St. Catherine in Minnesota, 1989; and Marymount-Tarrytown in New York, 1992--sensed a significant step forward in terms of maturity of the organization and range of sessions. The 205 pre-registrants came from 26 states and the District of Columbia; from 5 Canadian provinces; and from Ireland, England, and Australia.

Papers at the 68 sessions ranged from "Minority Sisterhoods" which focused on two congregations founded by and for African-American women and several Inuit congregations; to "Women Religious in China and Japan;" to "Women Religious and Education in Canada and Australia." "Sisters and Revolution" brought the experience of 18th-century Sisters of St. Joseph into perspective alongside Hungarian sisters who lived under Soviet occupation 1950-1989. A stunning photo exhibit enhanced the latter presentation.

Plenary session addresses were given by JoAnn McNamara on "Chastity and Gender;" Gerda Lerner on "Feminist Biblical Criticism and Religious Re-visioning;" and Patricia Wittberg, SC, on "The Rise and Fall of Religious Congregations." The Distinguished Historian Award was given to Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, in recognition of her promotion of the history of women religious through her writings and coordination of the HWR Conference since its inception in 1988.

Also featured were an art exhibit by local women artists; a film series, "Women Religious in the Hollywood Movie;" a dramatic presentation, "Off With Their Heads: An Exaltation of Nuns," written by Ursuline Irene Mahoney and performed by New York dramatists Roberta Nobleman and Janet Beddoe; and an evening excursion to Marquette University archives. Sister-List participants recruited new members through their red T-shirts, a special demonstration session, and an evening

social. The bookstore displayed a wide variety of pertinent publications. (For further commentary, see Ken Brigg's report reprinted in this issue with permission of the National Catholic Reporter.)

Everyone credited Conference '95 coordinator, Florence Deacon, OSF, with a superb job of planning and local arrangements. Flo chaired the program committee composed of Grace McDonald, FSPA; Barbara Misner, SCSC; and Jane Schulenburg. Elizabeth Kolmer, ASC, and Rosemary Rader, OSB, composed the Distinguished Historian Award committee.

A business meeting held the last day of the conference resulted in formation of a special committee to review suggestions for a more formal structure for the HWR Conference and to make recommendations. Members are Elizabeth McGahan, Regina Siegfried, Prudence Moylan, Barbara Zajac, Mary Hayes, Barbara Atkins, and Mary Roger Madden as chair. The group plans to meet next June in Terre Haute; its recommendations will be reported in a later issue of News and Notes. Meanwhile, HWR network coordination continues under the direction of the newsletter editor and the Ad hoc Conference Committee (membership as listed in editorial box).

Persons wishing to extend an invitation for the next conference site, June, 1998, are asked to contact the editor by December. To date, interest has been expressed by Loyola, Chicago (Mundelein center); St.-Mary-of-the-Woods, Terre Haute; and The Mount Conference Center, Atchison.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

Individual papers from Conference '95 and/or copies of the program may be requested from the News and Notes archives. Requests for papers will be honored depending on whether or not the author has deposited the paper, and has signed a release form allowing for distribution. Selected papers are

being published in the Winter issue of the U.S. CATHOLIC HISTORIAN.

BEIJING

The HWR Conference was represented at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, held in Beijing this September, through Kaye Ashe, OP and Mary Ewens, OP. Ewens attended the Non-Governmental Organization Forum where she displayed News and Notes and a variety of information on women religious around the world at a booth which she organized. Her report on the Beijing experience will be published in the February issue. We would be glad to include your impressions if you were among the participants. Over 60 women religious from the U.S. were expected to attend.

Ursuline nun, Dorothy Ann Kelly, president of the College of New Rochelle in New York City, attended the main Conference as a member of the official U.S. delegation.

PUBLICATIONS

PROMISES TO KEEP, a two-volume history of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, is available from its author, Margaret Patrice Slattery, CCVI, at the Incarnate Word Generalate, 4503 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209.

The ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY, forthcoming from Liturgical Press, will carry feature-length entries by Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, "Women Religious in American Catholic History," and Patricia Byrne, CSJ on "Sisters of St. Joseph." It will also include brief biographical and topical entries by Kennelly, Byrne, Margaret Quinn, CSJ, and, we suspect, by other HWR News and Notes subscribers. Please let News and Notes editor know of other authors/entries so they can be publicized.

The DIZIONARIO DEGLI ISTITUTI DI PERFEZIONE has now been published through volume 8, Saba-Spirituali, by Edizioni Paoline, Via Domenico Fontana, 12, Rome, Italy 00185. Volumes IX, Spiritualità-Zwijzen; and X, Indici, now in preparation, will complete the series which gives scholars an unusually comprehensive, substantive guide to the history, spirituality, and structure of religious congregations and secular institutes from the first centuries of the Christian era to the present.

CONTENDING WITH MODERNITY: *Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*, by Philip Gleason, will be available from Oxford Press by December. A comprehensive

analysis of Catholic higher education in the U.S., the book devotes only one brief chapter to colleges founded for women by U.S. sisterhoods, but also consistently integrates this aspect of the story into the general narrative.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Suellen Hoy, Visiting Associate Professor, University of Notre Dame, has received a \$3,000 grant from the Abigail Quigley McCarthy Center to assist with her research on "Caring for Women and Girls: Chicago's House of the Good Shepherd, 1859-1909."

Sisters of St. Joseph Patricia Byrne and Barbara Baer received a \$1,000 grant from the same source to assist them with their research on "Religious Communities of Women in North America: A Social History of the Sisters of St. Joseph."

Irene Woodward, director of the Ethics Across the Curriculum program at Holy Names College, is studying the emergence of small, intentional communities in the Roman Catholic and other religious traditions with a view toward publishing a book on the subject.

Monica Wood, SC, associate dean of libraries at St. John's University, Staten Island, New York, is working with published and unpublished sources to prepare an annotated bibliography of women religious and their educational endeavors among Native Americans. She has to date identified 36 congregations involved in such work.

Stephanie Mary Pilachowski, SSND, has taken for her thesis subject (for a doctoral degree in women's history at the University of Maryland), a demographic study of the North American membership of the School Sisters of Notre Dame during the years 1847-1912. She has nearly 5,000 sisters in her data base at this point.

George V. Fornero's dissertation at Loyola University, Chicago, was on Catholic highschools in Chicago 1955-1980. Fornero is currently a highschool principal in West Bloomfield, Michigan, but maintains a lively interest in topics relating to twentieth century women religious, in particular, in groups that disbanded or regrouped as a result of problems with bishops; in new orders formed from older ones; and structures that have supported groups of sisters such as the Black Sisters caucus.

Cynthia Glavac, OSU, who wrote a biography of Dorothy Kazel, OSU, for her dissertation in 1992, plans to publish an expanded version in book form. Kazel, along with Maryknoll

Sisters Maura Clark and Ita Ford and laywoman Jean Donovan, were murdered by government forces in El Salvador December 2, 1980.

Elizabeth Makowski, professor of history at Southwest Texas State University, is a medieval legal (canon law) historian working presently on nuns and semi-religious women as commented on by 14th and 15th century lawyers.

Helen McConnell, doctoral student at The Catholic University of America, is on a Fulbright in Germany studying the spirituality of Benedictine sister Aemiliana Loehr. Loehr, from the Abbey of the Holy Cross in Herstelle, was a prolific writer during the 1930-1950 period and had her works translated into five or six languages.

McConnell's dissertation director, Mary Collins, OSB, is preparing for publication "Sisters Professing Sisters: Retrieving a Forgotten Tradition," an article based on research in U.S. and European Benedictine archives.

REVIEW OF RECENT ARTICLES

Those of us who teach women's history and women's studies face the pleasant task each semester of selecting course readings from a richness of texts, primary source collections, and anthologies. Yet with the rare exception of Mary Oates' study of "Organized Voluntarism: The Catholic Sisters of Massachusetts, 1870-1940," included in the volume edited recently by Kitty Sklar, the seven most frequently used secondary source anthologies for women's history courses do not contain any other articles on the Catholic sisterhoods. In part, this invisibility suggests that we must become more sophisticated in identifying mainstream venues in which to tell our stories.

But as Leslie Tentler suggests in her article, "On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History," (American Quarterly, Vol. 45, #1, March, 1993, pp. 104 - 126) we may also need to rethink our research agendas, to break through institutional approaches, and to situate our history within the larger social context of American culture. Tentler argues that "Catholic sisters are not much studied, certainly not by women's historians or even, to any great extent, by historians of American Catholics."

The array of scholarly papers presented at the June, 1995 HWR Conference questions this assertion, and three articles published in the current issues of U.S. Catholic Historian (Vol. 13, #3, Summer, 1995) achieve precisely the contextualization for which Tentler argues by clearly placing sisters at the center

of the events of their times. Each of the articles is part of the issue's focus on social activism and as such provides new understandings of the expansive roles sisters played in the delivery of urban social services, in child welfare and in facilitating immigrant assimilation.

In their article, "Saving New York's Children," for example, Elizabeth McKeown and Dorothy M. Brown use a case study of the child care policies of the Sisters of Charity in their New York Foundling Hospital to describe Catholic participation in the "New York system" of public welfare implemented through private agencies. Specifically, they discuss the consequences of the "placing-out" system which the sisters employed at the end of the nineteenth century in order to find homes for poor children. In McKeown's and Brown's analysis, the Sisters of Charity emerge as major players in the evolution of social welfare policies, interacting simultaneously within the cultures of ecclesiastical politics, Progressive Era reform efforts, and state and local politics.

This dynamism is equally apparent in Margaret McGuiness' article "Body and Soul: Immigration and Catholic Social Settlements" (pp. 63 - 75), in which she describes the process through which Sister Justina Segale and Sister Blandina Segale experimented with a variety of formats for Italian immigrants in Cincinnati before recognizing that the settlement house approach provided the best means for enabling the Americanization of Italian immigrants while at the same time preserving their relationship to the Church.

These articles demonstrate the possibilities for moving the history of our congregations into the broader context of American life. They challenge us to recast our questions and to narrate anew the work in which our history has been -- not at the margins -- but at the center of American life.

Mary Hayes, SND
Trinity College
Washington, D.C.

PERSONAL NOTICES

We were saddened to learn at the Milwaukee Conference of the death of Sister Daniel Hannefin. A member of the Daughters of Charity, her DAUGHTERS OF THE CHURCH: *A Popular History of The Daughters of Charity In The United States*, published by New York City Press in 1989, leaves us a tangible gift of her spirit and a wonderfully informative account of her congregation.

REPORT, CONFERENCE '95

"Women's Awareness Rooted in Church"

By Kenneth A. Briggs

Special to the National Catholic Reporter

June 30, 1995

Religion, a breeding ground for patriarchy, has served over the centuries as the chief catalyst for the rise of feminist consciousness, a leading scholar of women's history told a conference here this week.

Gerda Lerner, professor of history emerita and former head of women's studies at the University of Wisconsin, told the History of Women Religious Conference that her research on the development of feminist thought led her to conclude, quite surprisingly, that the "main source" of women's consciousness was found in the recesses and folds of church history.

Such notables as medieval mystics Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich "appropriated the Bible and used it for their own purposes," interpreting passages with feminist sensibilities and using both female and androgynous imagery to describe the divine. Despite oppression by men, Lerner said, these and other women "wrote themselves into the story of redemption."

Because women had no intellectual or scholarly standing, she asserted, their individual writings were ignored and rarely transmitted to subsequent generations of women. It is only recently, she added, that scholars have become aware of the rich storehouse and the feminist legacy that it somewhat covertly nurtured. Lerner is the author of *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*.

The emergence of women religious into the mainstream of historical scholarship was greeted as a most encouraging sign by the more than 200 participants at the conference on the campus of Cardinal Stritch College. It came at a time when attention to the rediscovery of the origins and purposes of religious communities is on the rise -- an increase given great impetus by Vatican II -- and at a time when historians are refining methods to uncover sisters' histories.

Like two of the organization's previous conferences, the Milwaukee meeting featured plenary sessions on broad themes of feminist thought. It also included seminars on subjects ranging from particular foremothers and the influence of Irish nuns in Boston and San Francisco to the historian as detective.

Lerner's research was viewed by participants as a major breakthrough in efforts to place the history of sisters on the larger historical stage. Lerner describes herself as a not-very-

observant Jew who says she was disinclined to believe she would find contributions to feminist consciousness within Christianity.

Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon, a women's studies professor Cardinal Stritch and coordinator of the conference, said such meetings help steel resolve among historians of women religious to forge ahead.

"Often the history of women religious is not respected as a topic," she said. "It's important, therefore, that those who are doing it come together with others who also see it as a legitimate study. They meet people with similar interests. The world at large does not understand what religion has given to women and the voice it has given to women."

Others credit the continuing History of Women Religious project for bolstering the resolve of sisters to write about the past with accuracy and full disclosure. When Barbara Misner, Mercy Sister of the Holy Cross, began dissertation research in 1976 on the first eight permanent orders of women religious in America, she found nothing on the earliest decades and only scant material after that.

Bishops, Misner noted, often took credit for what anonymous sisters had done. Existing records, Misner said, often "left out any hint of struggle with bishops or priests." These omissions, she insisted, make it even more important for women to clarify the records.

Many sisters believe setting the story straight is especially important as religious communities face an uncertain future. With some communities looking at the possibility of extinction, promoters of a vigorous examination of the past insist that they are not chasing distractions or trying to revisit rosy yesteryears.

"This conference stimulates creativity among religious," said Christian Community Sr. Ritamary Bradley of St. Ambrose University. "It says, 'Here are the things sisters before us did under far worse circumstances.' It teaches us to meet our crisis situation in religious communities without focusing on survival, but rather on how we can carry out our mission."

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OPPORTUNITIES AND AWARDS

The spring meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association will meet March 22-23, 1996, at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas. Proposals for papers should be submitted no later than November 17, 1995, to Richard J. Schiefen, CSB, Chair, ACHA meeting, University of St. Thomas, 3800 Montrose Blvd., Houston, TX 77006. Proposals for entire sessions are preferred.

The Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession, the Conference Group on Women's History, and the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians announce its annual competition for a \$500 Graduate Student Award to assist in dissertation work. Applicants must be women graduate students in history departments in the U.S., but may be in any field of history. For applications, write Professor Shirley J. Yee, Award Committee, Women Studies Program, Box 35345, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

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