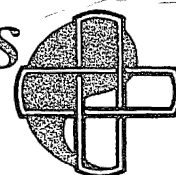


# History of Women Religious

## News and Notes



Volume 21—Number 3

October 2008

### HWR Network News

The Conference has been represented by its coordinator and several other members in the various planning phases for the exhibit, "Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America." The exhibit opens in spring 2009 and will travel nationwide for a three-year tour. Museum bookings were in the process of being confirmed as this issue went to press. For the latest information, see <www: womenandspirit>.

### Publications

*Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, trans. Margot H. King and Hugh Feiss (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2006), is the first comprehensive study in English of the holy woman (d. 1213) from the diocese of Liège who is regarded as the most important figure of the early beguine movement.

Beguines are also the subject of a recent doctoral dissertation by Erica Gelser, *Lay Religious Women and Church Reform in Late Medieval Munster: A Case Study* (University of Pennsylvania, 2008).

Anne L. Clark, "Guardians of the Sacred: The Nuns of Soissons and the Slipper of the Virgin Mary," *Church History* (76: 4, Dec. 2007, pp. 724-49), documents the intriguing role of one medieval religious congregation.

Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford University Press, 2008), continues her illuminating studies of women's religious life in the Spanish colony of Mexico.

Stephanie L. Kirk, *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), bases her gender study of actual and idealized seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women's congregations in Mexico on a scrutiny of texts documenting nuns' daily lives and the idealized version of their lives reflected in hagiographic tributes and conduct manuals.

Máire M. Kealy, *Dominican Education in Ireland 1820-*

*1930* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), has revised her doctoral dissertation at the University of Lancaster, England, to provide a comprehensive account of educational development in Ireland over the period under consideration with particular attention to the role of Dominican sisters.

Colleen Gray, *The Congrégation de Notre-Dame, Superiors, and the Paradox of Power, 1693-1796* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), explores the exercise of power in religious and socio-economic arenas during the eighteenth-century by superiors of this Montreal-based community.

Joseph Mannard, "Widows in Convents of the Early Republic: The Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1790-1860," *U.S. Catholic Historian* (26: 2, Spring 2008, pp. 111-132), in a study first presented at the HWR Triennial Conference (2007), utilizes the extensive religious archives of the country's first archdiocese to trace the origins of the women composing three women's congregations—the Carmelites, Sisters of the Visitation, and Sisters of Charity—during their foundational period.

Evangelina Bossert, OSB, "From Swiss Cloister to American Frontier: The Early History of the Benedictine Sisters of Idaho: Part I," *American Benedictine Review* (58: 3, Sept. 2007, pp. 267-79), begins a promising multi-part series on Benedictine women in the West.

*Lakotas, Black Robes, and Holy Women: German Reports from the Indian Missions in South Dakota, 1886-1900*, ed. Karl Markus Kreis, trans. Corinna Dally-Starna (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), places first-person accounts by Jesuits and Franciscan sisters in the context of life on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Brief biographies of the missionaries enhance the value of the reports, many of which are previously ignored descriptions by the sisters of daily life among the Lakota Sioux.

Rosalie McQuaide, csjp, reports that the "Women at the Table" project has completed *No Ordinary Woman*, a picto-

rial autobiography of Margaret Anna Cusack, the Nun of Kenmare and founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace. Based on Cusack's own writings about her life, the work is available in DVD format for the cost of shipping. For more information, contact McQuaide at [rmcquaide@verizon.net](mailto:rmcquaide@verizon.net) or by regular mail at 4842 Elon Crescent, Lakeland, FL 33810.

*Challenged by Coeducation: Women's Colleges since the 1960s*, ed. Leslie Miller-Bernal and Susan L. Poulson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), documents positions taken by thirteen women's colleges regarding coeducation, through case studies which pursue the theme of gender equity in education. Authors of the case studies on Catholic colleges are Prudence Moylan, BVM (Mundelein College, Chicago) and Dorothy Brown and Eileen O'Dea, SSND (the College of Notre Dame, Maryland).

Catherine Higgs and Jean N. Evans, RSM, "Embracing Activism in Apartheid South Africa: The Sisters of Mercy in Bophuthatswana, 1974-94," *Catholic Historical Review* (XCIV: 3, July 2008, pp. 500-21), document an important chapter in the Church's turn toward a more active role opposing racist government policies by examining the work of Sisters of Mercy with displaced peoples.

## Research in Progress

Caroline Bowden reports that funding has been received to support a prosopographical study of the membership of English convents and English members of Mary Ward's Institute during the period when they were proscribed in England. These houses, counting over 3,650 mostly English members, were all founded in exile in continental Europe. A full survey of surviving documents in conventual and public archives is planned, to be carried out by a team headed by Michael Questier as director and Bowden as project manager.

Meg Wilkes Karraker, professor of sociology at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN, is studying the social networks among Catholic women's religious orders with ministries to immigrant women and children, with a special interest in health ministries, but also citizenship, education, employment, housing, literacy, and legal aid. She plans to examine archival records and to interview executive directors and others in leadership in Minnesota, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin. She may be contacted at [MWKarraker@StThomas.edu](mailto:MWKarraker@StThomas.edu).

Jo Hook, School of Historical Studies, Monash University, Australia, is engaged in doctoral dissertation research on the subject of Catholic Sisters working in welfare in Melbourne from the 1960s to the present, with the general hypothesis that exploration of this subject is crucial for understanding the role of religion in Australia's recent welfare history. She is currently conducting oral history interviews with sisters from various religious orders and localities in Melbourne, thereby generating case studies through which to study key issues of faith, welfare, and gender. She may be contacted at [Jo@planethook.com](mailto:Jo@planethook.com).

Mary Jeremy Daigler, RSM, asks HWR readers' to contact her with information on women religious and the RC women's ordination movement in the U.S. The topic is part of a book she is preparing to write on the history of the Roman Catholic women's ordination movement in the United States. For details regarding the research and her request, contact her at [mjdaigler@comcast.net](mailto:mjdaigler@comcast.net).

## Book Reviews

*Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834*. Emily Clark (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Pp. 304. \$22.50.

In August, 1727, a tired, sea-tossed group of twelve French nuns stumbled out of their canoes to greet their Jesuit advocates on a dock in New Orleans, the center of colonial life in the New World province of *Louisiane*. In her penetrating examination, Emily Clark demonstrates how this event began a new chapter in colonial American life and in the legacy of the Ursulines, a female religious order devoted to the education of young girls. In their transformation from French to creole to American Ursulines, Clark affirms, the Ursulines deviated from and challenged the conventional model of American colonial womanhood because, unlike their British contemporaries, they remained "masterless mistresses" who exuded a "Catholic femininity, which embraced a class of unmarried women acting independently to advance the public good, [a model of femininity that] was fundamentally incompatible with American Protestant womanhood as it developed in the early Republic" (223).

Clark's goal is to demonstrate that between 1727 and 1834, New Orleans emerged as a "distinctive French colony" in which French Ursulines developed into a unique religious community. Drawing upon first-hand accounts, Ursuline biographies, and colonial archives, she illustrates how French Ursulines transported French Catholic traditions and struc-

tures to their New Orleans convent and adapted them to serve a racially, economically, and nationally mixed colonial population(40). Clark suggests that a uniquely French Ursuline legacy, shaped by seventeenth-century French Catholicism, included: traditional hierarchies, ideas about spiritual universalism, Eucharistic piety that transcended gender, and active public service. In New Orleans, this distinctive legacy not only legitimated their vocation to educate French girls as they had in France, but it also, according to Clark, justified broadening their work by facilitating racially integrated classrooms, forming a mixed-status female confraternity, raising female literacy rates beyond those in France (and beyond male rates in New Orleans), and, by the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, integrating Creole religious women into their convent. Further adaptations included plantation and slave ownership by which they gained a legitimate place in the plantation economy that secured their presence (217). Clark reveals that by the 1830s, a century after their arrival, the Ursuline colonial mission existed firmly at "the intersection of gender, class, religion, and race," a testament to the agency and creativity that exists in ambiguous colonial spaces. But their success at integrating their legacy with the colonial context also emphasized, "elements that were at odds with the normative culture of British North American that prevailed in the young Republic"(xv). Clark maintains that the Ursulines were marked by their colonial contemporaries as uncharacteristic, even subversive, because they "revealed the potential of women not bound by duty to husband or loyalty to family to abandon the cause of exclusion that marred the polity in antebellum America" (264).

Clark begins her book by tracing the Old World French origins of the Ursulines, placing them within the context of seventeenth-century French spirituality, and suggests that it is this tradition that French Ursulines transported to the New World and the legacy that framed the mission of the early New Orleans Ursulines. To this reviewer, it is the most problematic chapter. Clark rightly asserts that the French Ursuline piety was shaped by late-medieval Eucharistic piety, the missionary goals of the Catholic Reformation, and the seventeenth-century surge of charitable activity by French *dévotés*. But was this piety uniquely *Ursuline*? Or was it a shared legacy among other French (and perhaps European Catholic) missionaries? And if there was an Ursuline legacy to be transported to the colonies, which legacy was it?

Clark relies upon the work of Barbara Diefendorf, Elizabeth Rapley, and Linda Lierheimer to reconstruct the early seventeenth-century context within which French Ursulines grew, flourished, and multiplied (to over 350 houses

throughout France). But Eucharistic piety, Marian devotion, missionary goals, and active public service that Clarks claims as an *Ursuline* legacy were also the legacies of other Catholic Reformation orders (like the female Daughters of Charity, Visitation, Annunciation, and Grey Sisters, and the male Jesuits, Capuchins, and Dominicans) in France and other parts of Europe. While the Ursulines emerged and developed within this tradition, it was not uniquely *theirs*. And, in fact, there were deep and extensive divisions *among* Ursulines over their practices, their missionary role, and their level of active service. Eight Congregations of Ursulines (with different Rules, practices, and attitudes about claustration) existed by 1727. Some sought and embraced claustration, others tolerated it, and others outright rejected it. The first group of New Orleans Ursulines reflected this diversity, in fact; it consisted of twelve nuns from five different houses representing two different Congregations. Not only does this bring into question the idea of *an* Ursulines piety, it begs the question: Which one?

French Ursuline piety is also questioned when considering the developments in early eighteenth-century French Catholicism and the crises of absolutism, events that shaped a new generation of Ursuline missionaries – a generation shaped by a different set of political and religious circumstances, but also by the previous missions of their sisters. The fact is, this was the third of four Ursuline colonial missions established during the early modern period. Clark briefly alludes to the mission in New France (est. 1639), but neglects the impact of this and the Martinique mission (est. 1681) on the New Orleans Ursulines. Moreover, she acknowledges that "tensions that characterized the relationship between religious women and male authorities in France in the 1720s leaped the Atlantic with ease"(41), but she failed to articulate these tensions or demonstrate their impact on the New Orleans Ursulines who came from France. How was the experience of the New Orleans Ursulines the same or different from their sisters in other American Ursuline missions? How distinctive was the New Orleans mission, and in what ways?

The great strength and contribution of Clark's work is how it, as a local study, amends the larger picture of religious women in American colonies (North and South). While it may not (and perhaps doesn't intend to) address the comparative questions, it brings into sharp focus the colonial context of Louisiana and illuminates the agency of French nuns in designing, adapting, and maintaining a mission according to their particular Ursuline Rule and their legacy as *they* understood it. She demonstrates how Ursulines capital-

ized on the ambiguous and creative space of the colony (and even of the convent) when she asserts that, "holding fast to their own French identity and rigid customs of convent rank and order, they kept the loyalty of a changing, diverse population of women by the contradictory strategy of making their convent a space that resolutely welcomed women of all races, classes, and nationalities through the end of the colonial period" (61). For the New Orleans Ursulines, Catholic Reformation female piety unified the women of the colony and blurred social and racial distinctions in their classrooms, processions, confraternity, and other public service. In New Orleans, Clark shows us that the Ursulines created a society (in the colony and within the convent) that welcomed the "full range of New Orleans womanhood" (29): "poor widows, destitute orphans, and women of color alongside wealthy plantation mistresses," a [process] that was not likely in France (64). But in New Orleans, the Ursulines also inverted gender and class norms and "interrupted the smooth transformation of New Orleans into a model of southern republicanism." For this, Clark demonstrates, they encountered "predictable hostility" (226).

But were the Ursulines really "masterless mistresses" in their designs and contributions? Clark asserts "in the convent, where no earthly spouse or father was present to make and execute a financial strategy" (196), the Ursulines permanently remained, "women who would never pass from a period of brief independence as benevolent spinsters into the safe harbor of marriage" (264). While Clark certainly provides many examples of Ursuline agency, the "independence" of the Ursulines must, however, be qualified by the forces of the patriarchal Catholic Reformation Church that imposed claustration, even in the colonies, and that included the involvement of male Confessor/Superiors, colonial officials, Jesuits, and Company of the Indies directors in Ursuline affairs. While the work of Barbara Diefendorf, Jodi Bilinkoff, and Susan Dinan (among others), illustrates the collaborative relationship between male Superiors and nuns and the permeability of convent walls, we must be careful not to advance an argument about Ursuline independence, even in the colonies, that neglects these forces.

Clark's book raises questions that further scholarship on colonial religious women. More importantly, it provides a convincing, well-supported analysis of the transformation of small groups of European women into Americans. It is an important book for Europeanists because it extends the analysis of colonial identity beyond the point of arrival and early settlement into the realm of sustained contact between peoples, cultures, and identities. In her local study,

Clark demonstrates how the Ursulines contributed to the syncretization of French, creole, and American culture and developed an alternative model womanhood in the early Republic. This is a great contribution to scholarship on gender and colonial history and completes gaps on the development of colonial identities beyond the first point of contact. More importantly, it reveals how, together, comparative and local studies can provide a fuller, more complete understanding of historical subjects like colonial nuns and, specifically, the Ursulines.

Heidi Keller-Lapp  
University of California-San Diego

*Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727-1760.* Ed. Emily Clark (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007). Pp. vii-138. \$25.00.

*Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727-1760*, an edited volume of eighteenth-century documents from the archives of the first European nuns to establish a mission in Louisiana, is an outstanding contribution to the academic study of Roman Catholic professed women. Emily Clark distinguishes herself as a scholar and an editor for her graceful and insightful management of these materials which illuminate important aspects of Catholic womanhood in the early years of colonial North America.

This slim volume of fewer than 140 pages consists of a handful of letters written by the young French Ursuline of the book's title, five obituary notices from the New Orleans convent to European Ursuline houses, and a 1734 account of the impressive parade of citizens, clergy, and nuns from a temporary convent outside the city to a permanent urban location. Beware to the reader who thinks that such a limited collection of documents devoted to ordinary topics will make for a pedestrian read. Rather, every page overflows with compelling information about women, religious life, travel, cultural diversity, New World multi-racial society, and the ways in which nuns negotiated their complex secular and church relationships. At the center of this tale stand the original twelve Ursuline missionaries, women of intelligence and wit, driven by their individual sense of practicality, humanity, and spirituality. As editor, Emily Clark teases out the myriad nuances in their lives, explaining events and terminology for those unacquainted with convent practices of an earlier time. Overall, the result allows these lively Ursuline voices to resonate across the centuries. Indeed, the

author of the letters, known in religion as Sister Stanislaus, emerges with such clarity of personality that one grieves to come unexpectedly to a 1760 obituary for the engaging nun who died in her sleep at age fifty-three.

*Voices from an Early American Convent* deserves wide notice among those interested in the history of nuns and sisters. Emily Clark has demonstrated convincingly in this publication, as well as in her larger work, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834*, that religious congregations have nothing to fear from responsible and well-trained scholars. While matters of in-house loyalty and spiritual confidentiality are valid issues for any religious order, the solid scholarship and moving text of Emily Clark point to the merit of unlocking convent records, setting aside protective hagiography in favor of a human narrative that was nurtured through womanly spirituality. Treating nuns of the past, as well as their clerical friends and foes, as real people with strengths and weaknesses does not detract from them or their congregations. Rather, it elevates and honors the realities of life for religious women, whose herculean efforts served American Catholicism, even as that very institution relegated its nuns

and sisters to a woefully underappreciated place in church history. Congratulations to Emily Clark and the Ursulines of New Orleans for countering that injustice with the powerful tools of historical evidence, thoughtful analysis, and balanced interpretation.

Anne M. Butler, Emerita  
Utah State University

## Announcements

We regret to announce the death of HWR member Ann Thomasine Sampson, CSJ, August 18, 2008. An accomplished musician and high school teacher, she expressed a lifelong interest in history by taking a towboat journey retracing the Mississippi river route traveled by sisters of her congregation from New Orleans to St. Louis and from there to St. Paul in the early nineteenth century. She created an oral history collection for the St. Paul Province of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and published numerous books and articles including *Care With Prayer*, a history of St. Mary's Hospital, Minneapolis, and *Seeds on Good Ground*, a series of biographical essays on pioneer sisters.

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Karen M. Kennelly, Editor  
HWR News and Notes  
1880 Randolph Avenue  
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2401 Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, Editor  
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## ***History of Women Religious*** ***News and Notes***

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The School Sisters of St. Francis are seeking an editor for a history, now in manuscript form, of their seven U.S. provinces. Please contact Barbara Kraemer, SSSF, at bkraemer@sssf.org if you are interested.

The Spring meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association will be held at La Salle University, Philadelphia, April 17-18, 2009. Proposals for panels (preferred) and papers should be emailed by October 1 to Margaret McGuinness at mcguinness@lasalle.edu.

The 44<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies convenes May 7-10, 2009, at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan. For more information use the Congress web site, [www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress](http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress) or email [medieval-institute@wmich.edu](mailto:medieval-institute@wmich.edu).

The Western Association of Women Historians will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary at its next conference, April 30-May 3, 2009, at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California. For more information use the Conference web site, [www.wahw.org](http://www.wahw.org) or email [amessington@wawh.org](mailto:amessington@wawh.org).

The Organization of American Historians next conference, on the theme "American Culture, American Democracy, will be April 7-10, 2010, at the Hilton Washington, Washington, D.C. The conference includes sessions on museums

and archives. Electronic submission of proposals, entire sessions preferred but individual papers accepted, welcome from 1 Oct. 2008 to 15 Feb. 2009. See the OAH web site for details.

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### **Newsletter Deadline**

Please have copy for the **February 2009 issue** to the Editor by **January 1, 2009**. [KKennelly33@hotmail.com](mailto:KKennelly33@hotmail.com)

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