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# HISTORY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

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NEWS AND NOTES

## CONFERENCE

The many promising papers and registration as of mid-May indicate that we can look forward to a meeting with great potential for stimulating research in the general subject of the history of women religious. Registrations will be accepted up to Conference time, June 25. Write the newsletter for copies of the program if you were missed the first time around or have need for additional copies to share with colleagues and friends.

## CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Writing the history of congregations, organizing for the research and writing task, and cultivating awareness of community history among the membership as well as experiencing community history in unique ways are activities reflected in items reaching *News and Notes* for this issue.

Madonna Kolbenschlag reports that preparations are well advanced for a joint pilgrimage by the two Humility of Mary congregations back to their roots in France. Madonna and 18 other Congregation of the Humility of Mary members, along with 25 Humility of Mary members—both groups stem from the 1954 French and 1864 United States foundations—are due to travel this summer to their foundation site in France on what she describes as “another indication of the way American women religious are ‘bonding’ and celebrating their ‘connections.’”

Two Franciscan congregations have reunited and have published a condensed version of their historical chronicles: *Priceless Heritage*, by Donna Marie Steinman, FSM, and Lynn Allen relates briefly the history of the Sisters of St. Francis (1894) and the Sisters of St. Mary (1872) which go now under the title of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary with their center in St. Louis, Missouri.

The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary have formed the “BVM Historical Society” to research, collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit the history of the congregation. It is anticipated that Sister-members of the new Society will serve as authors of research papers, media events, and art forms; developers of and critics for historical theses; curators of the Old Motherhouse in Dubuque; archivists and recorders of oral history; and as an editorial board for publications of BVM history. Those familiar with the work done in the past on BVM history (by Jane Coogan, Mary De Cock, and others) will not be surprised at this initiative which should ensure continued attention to the rich history of this congregation. One of the stimulants for the Society was anticipation of the 1992 Centennial of the Mount Carmel Motherhouse.

Margaret Mary Reher, Cabrini College, is researching the relationship of Cardinal Dougherty with four communities in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia: the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters; Medical Mission Sisters; Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; and the Carmelites. Marge, who presented some of her initial findings at the spring American Catholic Historical Association meeting in a paper entitled “*Cardinal Dennis J. Dougherty: An Unlikely Feminist*,” is particularly interested in determining if Dougherty dealt differently with religious women (he worked with 25 women’s congregations in Philadelphia alone) than he did with ordained clergy of the archdiocese.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary community of Monroe, Michigan, is in the early stages of setting up a committee, discussing methodology, and developing ideas in preparation for writing a new history of the Monroe IHM’s. The congregation at Monroe has a valuable archival collection pertaining to their early and continuing role as educators (academy 1846; college, 1899 postgraduate honors awarded to 1897 and 1898 academy graduates; and many other schools). The congregation’s broadening of apostolate in recent decades has taken them into many new capacities at home and abroad where they currently have members on mission in the Latin American countries of Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Mexico, in addition to Puerto Rico; and in the African countries of Ghana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Patricia Lynch, SBS, is currently writing a history of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, founded in 1891 by Mother Katherine Drexel. Patricia will be sharing some facets of her research at the June Conference and plans publication to mark the Congregation's centennial in 1991. Mary Best's volume (see following) alludes to numerous instances of Mother Katherine Drexel's assistance to the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters as they struggled to make elementary and secondary education available to African Americans in Mississippi.

Mary Best, editor and journalist currently residing in Conneaut, Ohio, completed in 1983 a history of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters which has just been published by the Sisters' Techny, Illinois press: *Seventy Septembers*, 1901 immigrant-missionaries from Steyl, Holland, these Sisters worked closely with priests of the Society of the Divine Word who began the country's first Catholic training school for missionaries and pioneered in the apostolate among African Americans in Mississippi and other southern states. The book contains many insights into collaboration among congregations of women and men working in the south, on accommodation to the "separate but equal" atmosphere of the last decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of this century; on the education of the Sisters whose Holland motherhouse conducted a four-year normal school; on vocations to the priesthood and religious life among African Americans, and on the beginnings of missionary consciousness among U.S. Catholics.

Shawn Copeland, OP, currently on the Yale Divinity School faculty, brought the sensitive awareness of her own African American heritage to a related topic in the paper she presented at the spring meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association, "The Mission and Meaning of the National Black Sisters' Conference 1968-1988." In the process of tracing the evolution of the Black Sisters' Conference, Shawn developed a brief account of attempts by African American Catholics in the U.S. to make the struggle for social justice a Catholic cause from 1889 to 1924. She also traced the relationship between African American Catholic women and Catholic Sisterhoods in the United States as an important preface to formation of the BSC.

Helen Kelley, IHM, is well into the writing of the history of the California IHM Sisters. We look forward to her finished product and the perspectives it will bring not only to the past record of this congregation but also to the trends and events which have affected all U.S. women religious during the post-Vatican II renewal era.

The Franciscan Sisters in Dubuque are bringing their 1978 history up to date in anticipation of the 125th anniversary of their foundation in Herford, sovereignty of Westphalia and now a part of Germany. This community came to the U.S. in 1875.

Janet Griffin, CDP, on the faculty of Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, continues to explore her congregation's history through its women leaders. She is presently studying documents relating to Mother St. Andrew Felton, the first Sister of the Congregation of Divine Providence to come to Texas (1866). Janet has agreed to lead a group discussion at the June Conference on "*Feminism of Religious Women in the Old South*" (for her article by that title, covering the years 1820-1868, see *Sisters Today*, 58:5, January, 1987).

## SOCIAL HISTORY

Mary Lou Anderson's doctoral dissertation topic at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is Catholic women's colleges. Mary Lou, a lecturer in English at Assumption College, Worcester, is investigating in her thesis the question of such colleges being both Catholic and feminist. She would appreciate at this early stage of her work any help or suggestions *HWR News and Notes* readers may have. The character and dimensions of the women's college movement are becoming better known and understood thanks to the recent work of Mary Oates whose introductory essay in her anthology on *Higher Education for Catholic Women* (Garland, 1987) was recently published in slightly revised form in the *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7:4 (Fall, 1988), 413-428. The coming (June) issue of ACCU's *Current Issues* will carry a short article by Karen Kennelly on the same subject.

Janice Farnham, RJM (see *News and Notes* October 1988) completed in March her dissertation on "*Alternative Childhood: Girls' Providences in Nineteenth Century Lyons (1800-1850)*." Her findings should be instructive on the question of the transfer of congregations from Europe to the U.S. affording, as the thesis does, a thorough look at institutions for working girls conducted by congregations which made U.S. foundations during the same period of years.

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## WORLD PERSPECTIVES

Constance Berman, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Iowa, has embarked on a study of Cistercian nuns in northern France in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries from which she hopes to publish a monograph on nuns and their property in medieval Europe. Many readers will be familiar with her articles on the relationship of women to the Cistercian order.

Madeleine Sophie McGrath recently completed a doctoral thesis at Macquarie University, North Ryde, Australia, on "*Women Religious in the History of Australia: A Case Study, the Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta.*" The Sisters' history is interpreted as intersecting in Australia the areas of Church history, the history of education, social welfare, cultural history—specifically in the fields of religion and music—and women's history. In the words of an Australian colleague, "there are still many unanswered and indeed unasked questions about the role and impact of nuns in Australian history," but this thesis asks and answers some of the questions.

Noela M. Fox, PBVM, studying at the University of New England, has also produced a dissertation with relevance for the Australia scene and beyond. Her "*Religious Women: The Search for Visibility and Meaning*" examines the position of religious women in the Church and the effects of various Church edicts on their life style; the Haggia Haggia Presentation Sisters are the object of particular study in this thesis which concludes with a series of challenging questions regarding the capacity of Sisters in the late twentieth century to recapture the inner spirit and dynamism which enabled foundresses and earlier sisters to become initiators in spite of cultural, social and sometimes ecclesiastical difficulties.

Mary Rose MacGinley, PBVM, a foundation member of the Institute of Religious Studies in Australia, is now working on a general study of women religious in Australia. Her publications include research monographs on aspects of religious life, and most recently, two studies in *The Church's Mission In Australia*.

Patricia Byrne, CSJ, and Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ, are developing a project which has as its aim production of a one-volume history dealing with women's religious communities in a cross-cultural setting, particularly since the early modern period. Women in the non-western as well as western traditions are included in this broad-scope

effort. Pat and Amelia will share their plans at the June Conference.

## SPIRITUALITY

Irene Mahoney, OSU, a recent subscriber to *HWR News and Notes* and a long-time teacher of writing and literature at the College of New Rochelle, writes that the Ursulines are celebrating the 350th anniversary of the arrival in North America (Quebec, 1639) of Marie Guyart, better known as Marie de L'Incarnation. Irene, author of several biographies and novels, has been researching the life and writings of Marie Guyart and recently edited the volume of Guyart's writings that appears in the Paulist Press series, *Sources of American Spirituality*. Only two women, Guyart and Elizabeth Bayley Seton, are represented in that multi-volume series.

Mary Ann Donovan, SC, on the faculty of the Graduate Theological Union and the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, promises to bring fresh enlightenment on the subject of the spirituality of the U.S. women religious with her keynote address at the June Conference, "*Spirit and Structure: Historical Factors Affecting the Expression of Charism in an American Religious Congregation.*" The deeper self-understanding which such exploration can bring should stimulate future directions in research and help dispel the clouds of invisibility that hang over the history of religious life.

Two studies are underway that promise further enlightenment: Miriam Ukeritis, CSJ, is involved with a Lilly Endowment-funded project, "*Factors Influencing the Transformation of Religious Life in the Catholic Church in the United States.*" Miriam is working out of the Center for Applied Social Science at Boston University and is associated with David Nygren, SJ, in this project. Lora Ann Quinonez, CDP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN are engaged in researching and writing the history of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (originally the Conference of Major Superiors of Women), also with assistance from the Lilly Endowment.

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## RESOURCES

The Women's History Network connects people throughout the country who are working to write women back into history and who would like to benefit from others' experience. It publishes a quarterly newsletter with information relevant for planning programs, activities, and classes; a directory of members; and a catalog of curriculum resources. Its National Women's History Project staff gives technical assistance for program planning and makes referrals to women's history performers (one of whom is Martha Ann Kirk, CCVI, due to perform at our June Conference), films, exhibits, classroom activities and the like. For further information write National Women's History Project, P.O. Box 3716, Santa Rosa, CA 95402-3716.

## NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Please have copy for the October issue to the editor by September 1, using the new address as given below. The changed location of the editorial office is effective this July.

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