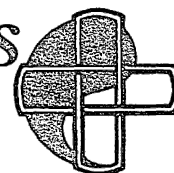


# History of Women Religious

## News and Notes



Volume 21—Number 1

February 2008

### HWR Network News

Editorial offices have moved from St. Louis, Missouri to St. Paul, Minnesota. Please note the address for the new location on the mailer section of this issue as well as in the Newsletter Deadline box. The Editor/Coordinator of the Network remains Karen M. Kennelly. The e-mail remains KKennelly33@hotmail.com.

Please note the month/day/year printed after your name on your address label (e.g., 12/20/07 indicates your subscription is paid through December 20, 2007) and bring your subscription up to date if you are in arrears.

### Publications

Fiona J. Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), bases her major new study of women and religion in the early middle ages on the reconstructed (Warburg Institute 1979) manuscript of the *Hortus deliciarum* by Herrad of Hohenbourg, abbess of the Augustinian canoness convent in Alsace.

Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), brings Clare, commonly recognized as the first woman to write a monastic rule for other women, together with Agnes of Prague to demonstrate how women succeeded in securing papal recognition for their definition of how women's monastic life would develop.

John W. Coakley, *Women, Men and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (Columbia University Press, 2006), explores with a sure touch the elusive balance between holy women from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries and their male clerical biographers.

F. Thomas Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (Cornell University Press, 2006), continues the scholarly effort of recent decades to discover the historical person of Catherine Benincasa behind the idealized saint, within the socio-political culture of late medieval Siena.

Several essays in the collection edited by Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole, *Religion in New Spain* (University of New Mexico Press, 2007) focus on women religious: Asunción Lavrín, "Female Visionaries and Spirituality;" and Mónica Díaz, "The Indigenous Nuns of Corpus Christi: Race and Spirituality." Asunción Lavrín and Rosalva Loreto L., eds., *Diálogos espirituales. Manuscritos Femeninos Hispanoamericanos, Siglos XVI-XIX* (Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla and Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, 2006), have co-edited a collection of largely unpublished texts covering four centuries of writings by nuns and *beatas* from Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic.

Querciolo Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474-1540)* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), analyzes the significance of Angela Merici's life and work from institutional, social, cultural and spiritual perspectives. His work invites comparison with that of Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005) who also focuses on movements among women (*beatas, bizzoche*) to form religious communities unbound by canonical requirements of cloister.

Sylvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1450-1700* (Oxford University Press, 2007), treats of the crucial period spanning the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the emergence of early modern

European institutional and cultural development as this pertained to the phenomenon of religious life for women.

Louise Sullivan, DC, *Sister Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity on Fire with Love for the Poor* (Vincen-tian Studies Institute, 2007), provides the first definitive biography of this remarkable woman (1786-1856), beatified in 2003, who spent 54 years serving the desperate poor of Paris. A street-smart friend of poor and powerful alike, she began a vast network of charitable services and is acknowledged as co-founder (with Frédéric Ozanam) of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in 1833. The 456 pp. volume, annotated and illustrated, may be ordered online from the Vincen-tian Studies Institute at [http://vsi.depaul.edu/bookstore/art\\_interest.html](http://vsi.depaul.edu/bookstore/art_interest.html) or call 312-362-7139.

Emily Clark, ed., *Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Or-leans Ursulines, 1727-1760* (Louisiana State, 2007), publishes various first-hand accounts written by the Ursuline nuns who established their congregation in the French colony of New Orleans in 1727—the first such foundation in territory that would eventually compose part of the United States.

Several persons active in the History of Women Re-ligious network are contributors to *Changing Habits, Women's Religious Orders in Canada*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Smyth (Novalis Publishing, Toronto, 2007). In ad-dition to Smyth who contributes an essay on teaching sisters in the twentieth century, Elizabeth McGahan writes on sectarianism, ethnicity and gender in Saint John, New Brunswick, schools; Heidi MacDonald, on entering the convent in the 1930s; Veronica O'Reilly, on the insider problematic in the writing of congrega-tional history; and Rosa Bruno-Jofré, on the renewal process as experienced by the Missionary Oblate Sisters 1963-1989.

Sharon C. Knecht, *Oblate Sisters of Providence: A Pic-torial History* (Donning Company Publishers, 2007), illustrates the remarkable history of the Oblates (see earlier works by Diane Batts Morrow) through hundreds of photographs from the congregation's archives.

Helen Herbstritt, OSB, ed., *Benedictine Harvest: Historical Sketches for Benedictine Communities of*

*Women* (Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, 2002), includes brief descriptions of 76 communities, mostly in the U.S. Orders for copies at \$5.00 will be filled while the limited supply lasts. Send payment to the Center at 1135 Flanner Hall, Univer-sity of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556.

Richard Fossey and Stephanie Morris's joint work, "St. Katherine Drexel and St. Patrick's Mission to the Indians of the Southern Plains: A Study in Saintly Administration," appears in *Catholic Southwest: A Jour-nal of History and Culture* (18: 2007), 61-84.

Ellen Whelan, OSF, has completed *The Sisters Story: Saint Mary's Hospital-Mayo Clinic, 1939-1980* (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, Rochester, Minnesota, 2007), the second volume of her history of the Franciscan Sisters who teamed up with the doctors Mayo to found a medical complex of worldwide fame (see, on vol. I, 1889-1939, *HWR News and Notes* 16:1, February 2003).

Cindy Yik-yi Chu, ed., *The Diaries of the Maryknoll Sisters in Hong Kong 1921-1966* (Palgrave Macmil-lan, 2007), builds on the Maryknoll Sisters' diaries to construct the history of Hong Kong from the 1920s to the early 60s. Her earlier work, *The Maryknoll Sisters in Hong Kong, 1921-1969*, was also published by Pal-grave (2004; see *HWR News and Notes* 18:3, October 2005).

Amy Koehlinger, "Academia and Aggiornamento: The Social Sciences and Postconciliar Reform Among American Sisters," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25:4 (Fall 2007), 63-83, explores the influence of the social and behavioral sciences on the transformation of American sisters in the Vatican II conciliar era, focusing on two congregations in the Pacific Northwest.

## Research in Progress

Maggie Marystone is the principal researcher for a film and videos on women religious. "A Gift of Forty Years" will be a feature-length documentary about American nuns and social justice intended for broadcast on public television. The filmmakers are currently seeking films and videos of any length or quality depicting the involvement of women religious in the following: civil rights, peace and social justice movements from the 1960s to the present; the Sis-

ter Formation Conference; Vatican II; and women's rights within the Catholic church. The materials will be considered for inclusion in the film; all originals will be copied and safely returned to their owners. The filmmakers welcome calls or e-mails from anyone with information. Please contact Chicago-based Marystone at mmarystone@gmail.com, or call 773-728-3945.

Loyola University (Chicago) professor Bren A. O. Murphy (*A College of Their Own*, a 55-minute documentary about Illinois' last women's college, 2000) and award-winning independent documentarian Barbara Zeman (*Rome Pilgrimage—Journey into Jubilee*, 2000, aired on over 50 PBS stations) will produce a full length documentary film that examines the wide variety of visual images of Catholic nuns and sisters used in contemporary U.S. popular culture and contrast these images with the lives of women religious, both historical and current. Interviews of prominent women are underway and an advisory council is being formed. Completion is anticipated in Fall 2008.

Patrick Hayes, department of theology and religious studies at St. John's University, Staten Island, New York, is continuing the Vatican II Remembrance Project begun several years ago. This oral history endeavor seeks out women religious over the age of 60 who have recollections of Catholic life before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council who are willing to give an in-person or telephone interview to a graduate student under Hayes' direction. Further information is available on his personal email hayesp@stjohns.edu.

A committee composed of Helen Garvey, BVM, Barbara Cervenka, OP, Mary Charlotte Chandler, RSCJ, Karen Kennelly, CSJ, and Constance Phelps, SCL continues to work on the implementation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious exhibit project, *Pioneers, Poets & Prophets: Catholic Sisters in America*. Approximately \$3M has been raised toward a \$3.5M goal. Both Ellis Island and the Smithsonian have responded favorably to the committee invitation to show the exhibit and have made tentative commitments, the one for late 2009 and the other for early 2010. Additional venues are being approached to fill out a traveling exhibit schedule. A professional firm is in the initial phase of research toward actual construction. Further information is available from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). See [www.lcwr.org](http://www.lcwr.org).

Margaret Nacke, CSJ reports good progress on the broadcast documentary in which she is involved. A film crew from NewGroup Media, South Bend, Indiana went to the Ukraine in October with an itinerary including Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia for filming and interviews. Nacke is also working on a traveling exhibit to be shown at Catholic universities located in areas where there are large populations of Central and Eastern Europeans. She suggests that persons in a position to influence graduate students' dissertation topics might consider inviting research about Sisters/congregations suppressed under communism in Eastern Europe.

Several papers presented at The American Catholic Historical Association annual meeting in Washington, D.C. January 3-6, reflected research pertaining to Canadian women religious: Rosa Bruno-Jofre, "The Missionary Oblate Sisters: the Process of Renewal from 1963, the Path to a Renewed Understanding of the Ministry and Work in Rwanda;" Elizabeth Smyth, "Missions at Home and Abroad in the Twentieth Century: the Experience of Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (GSCI);" and Elizabeth W. McGahan, "Twentieth-Century Governance and Missions with the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception." A joint session with the American Historical Association included other research of interest, specifically, Ping-Yuan Wang's paper, "The Belgian Visitandines and the Discourses of the Collective Self, 1650-1715."

## Book Review

*Ordinary Sisters: The Story of the Sisters of St. Agnes, 1858-1990*. Margaret Lorimer, CSA. (privately printed by the Sisters of St. Agnes, 2007; address 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI 54935). Pp. 601. \$25.

Years ago at a HWR conference during a discussion on the future of religious communities and the need for hope, someone mentioned the story of a community that had been down to one blind nun yet ultimately grew to over 700 Sisters. No one was quite sure of the community, but the Sisters of St. Agnes were mentioned as a possibility. I was always intrigued by that story, especially since the community initials CSA- though not the community- were the same as my own. So I eagerly offered to review this book.

Lorimer traces the beginnings of the Sisters of St. Agnes, founded in 1858 by Australian missionary Father Caspar Rehrl who came with German immigrants to Wisconsin. Though well-meaning, Rehrl basically wanted sisters to staff his schools. He seems to have had little understanding of religious life although he had prayed to St. Agnes to help him start a community and had the encouragement of Pius IX. Though some young women came, they soon left, and by 1861, only blind Sister Charles Hofer remained. Eventually, a few more women came, including Agnes Hazotte. In 1864, she became the first elected superior at age 17 and continued in that position until her death in 1905. She soon realized that in order to make the community a true religious institute she would have to challenge the decisions of Rehrl.

The first 25 years were filled with hardships, misunderstanding, conflicting demands and expectations of Rehrl, and internal turmoil among the sisters, some of whom turned against Agnes who was trying to develop a motherhouse in Fond du Lac where the sisters could be properly trained in religious life. The Capuchin Fathers, particularly Fr. Francis Haas, befriended Agnes when the diocesan vicar abruptly decided to disband the community, which was actually two communities at this point. Haas became their ecclesiastical superior, wrote their constitutions, and secured their approval as a papal congregation thus beginning what was to be a life-long relationship of the Capuchins and Agnesians. Interestingly, these three people who are considered the founders did not plan or work together!

In spite of this rocky beginning, within the first 50 years the Sisters of St. Agnes had taken on schools in neighboring states as well as in the Southwest United States, and responded to requests to take on a house for German immigrants, a hospital and an orphanage. Lorimer narrates the subsequent stability and growth of the community in parish schools, high schools, a college, hospitals, a school of nursing, orphanages, a home for the elderly, and missions in Latin America., where later two sisters would be violently killed. By the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there were more than 800 members, marking the high point in terms of members and institutes, a testament to the CSA's great generosity and courage in undertaking so many commitments to serve people. Woven into the mission

and ministry history from 1858 to 1990 is the narrative of the inner life of the community as it struggled with the early development and later efforts, especially under strong superiors, to bring uniformity, as well as the rapid and often tumultuous years of renewal following Vatican II.

Lorimer places all of these developments in the context of the history of the world, the U.S., and the Catholic Church, which gives a richness to the chronological history. In spite of the length of the book, Lorimer is adept at making the details, facts, names, and dates come alive for interested readers. For examples, we learn about the lives of a novice and professed through journals and letters they kept. *Women of Courage, Faith and Vision* is a model essay for integrating data and personal stories into a succinct summary of the early years of a community.

*Ordinary Sisters* charts a course familiar to many communities, yet is unique in its own story. These ordinary sisters have done extraordinary things remarkably well.

Mary Denis Maher, CSA

Archivist, Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine

*From Piety to Professionalism and Back? Transformations of Organized Religious Virtuosity.* Patricia Wittberg, SC (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006). Pp. xii+338. \$88.

Historically the path of religious enlightenment was one of inner spiritual perfection pursued by individuals. Beginning in the sixteenth century Catholics such as Ignatius of Loyola and Angela Merici created a new path of religious virtuosity that combined active service with spiritual exercises. By the nineteenth century Protestants began to organize mission societies that also combined active service with spiritual exercise. By the twentieth century, Catholic and Protestant women had formed religious congregations or societies in which individual members gained spiritual perfection through dedicated service in educational, health care or social service institutions. After 1960 although religious women as individuals continued to combine service and spiritual practice their congregations and societies began to withdraw from institutional commitments.

Wittberg tells the story of this change in women's

religious communities by examining the information gained from interviews with 36 focus groups (24 with Catholic sisters, 3 with a Protestant order of deaconesses and 9 with members of a Protestant missionary society) and 30 individual Catholic sisters. She carefully explains her theoretical framework for analysis that combines two approaches to organizational sociology, organizational culture and neo-institutionalism, with theories of secularization and desecularization from the sociology of religion. The sociological perspective brings sharp clarity to the consequences of organizational change not only for those directly affected but also for the larger society. The book is organized in four parts; part one gives a historical overview that explains the need for the study, part two shows the impact of institutions on the culture of the women's communities studied, part three examines the process of withdrawal from these institutions after 1960 and part four considers how this changing relationship with institutions has impacted the personal, professional and communal lives of the members of women's religious communities.

The focus of this study is the United States, although the impact of religious service institutions was a significant aspect of missionary activity throughout the world. In the United States the remarkable growth of religious institutions is enumerated. In 1910 Catholic sisters owned and ran thirteen women's colleges; by 1967 they had established 223 colleges of which 117 remained in 1994. The growth of hospitals with religious sponsorship was similarly dramatic, from 1929 through the 1970s nearly 70% of hospitals in the United States were private, and a majority was Catholic. These institutions often included medical schools, nursing schools and research institutes. Social work included the care and education of orphans, housing for single women and the elderly, and feeding the poor. All of this good work required the labor of thousands of women and the development of a religious ideology that supported this commitment. For Catholics the commitment was first of all to "save souls" to be achieved through diverse forms of service. Protestants did not see modern culture as a threat but they did see education as essential for religious development and they feared the "Catholic onslaught." (38) All Christian groups saw their service as contributing to the scriptural mandate to bring Christ to all peoples. The tremendous work of maintaining these institutions had a powerful influence on the founding congregations

and societies of women as well as on their denominations.

In some instances the service provided the motivation for the creation of the religious congregations or societies. In all instances the services provided the context for finding new recruits and thus provided the cultural homogeneity of many groups. The women also attracted recruits interested in the work itself, and the congregations and societies were increasingly identified and recognized by outsiders for the work they did. The demands of the work led to the education of members. Individuals rose to positions of leadership within institutions in roles that they would otherwise not have imagined for themselves. For some, however, despite the development of their skills and talents, the demands of service were met at great personal cost. The success of the work led to increasing social recognition and power for both the communities of women and the denominations to which they belonged. The control of resources of land, personnel, and essential services gave women a voice in denominational decisions they would not otherwise have had. This power could also create tension within the denominations or the local communities.

Having clearly established the integral organizational link between religious institutes of women and the active service they provided, Wittberg next provides an explanation of how this link was broken by internal and external pressures. The professionalizing of education and health care led to increasing homogeneity of staff training and practice that often minimized the importance of spiritual values. The religious institutions came to resemble their secular counterparts. External accrediting and funding agencies established professional standards as a basis for recognition that had little concern with religious commitments. Religious women withdrew from social work early in the twentieth century as lay boards or diocesan boards took control of the institutions and introduced new professional qualifications for staffing. In education and health care the women maintained control of the funding and staffing of their institutions until the 1960s when for reasons of financial and legal security lay boards of trustees were created. Just as large numbers of women left religious congregations and societies after 1960, the groups themselves began to encourage members to choose their own work rather than to continue to serve in sponsored institutions. As changes

in personnel and funding grew religious founders and their institutions drifted apart sometimes without adequate planning for the consequences. As fewer leaders and employees of institutions came from the religious founding groups and financial decision making took precedence over religious ideals the meaning of sponsorship weakened. The attention given to these issues has focused primarily on how the religious identity of the service institution has been affected not on how the founding religious organizations have changed.

Wittberg provides a sociological explanation of the changes in religious societies of women as a consequence of their separation from their original institutional mission. This includes changes in purpose and goal. Among Catholic sisters' focus groups there was a shift from institutional service within the larger denomination to the personal and spiritual growth of the members. The external identity of the groups has weakened or disappeared as the previous commitment to education and or health care has shifted to the variety of works chosen by individual members. This has also made recruitment more difficult since potential members no longer have the opportunity to experience the unique spirit of the distinct communities in their work, and the role of women religious within the larger denomination is not well understood or fully recognized. Men have replaced women as leaders in most of the institutions that still retain a religious identity so the influence of women in denominational decision making has been reduced. Without a common work the mechanisms for sustaining a common life and culture are reduced. It is harder to provide new members with the historical memory that establishes common bonds. Mutual support is more difficult as members work in varied locations and often live alone or in small groups. The external community no longer affirms the essential services the group provides so there is less experience of pride in the organization. The diversity of service work chosen by individual members has led to less interest in the administrative leadership of the congregation and more difficulty in strategic planning for the group. Education and training of members focuses more on professional qualifications and work itself increases the strength of professional identification often at the expense of religious identification. Mentoring for leadership is increasingly difficult without an institutional context. This results in fewer women who aspire to leadership roles in society or in their own congregations preferring rather to

do direct service to those in need. As diversity among members gets increasing respect the ability to influence public policy by a unified stand on a particular issue diminishes. As women religious serve the poor and the marginal they, in effect, renounce the basis of their group power in society and in the denomination. Wittberg concludes with a few comments on why this matters to society. First, the loss of the link between institutional service and spiritual growth has contributed to an increasing privatization of religion in society. Second within the denominations themselves the absence of the religious virtuosity of service has reduced their social visibility, distinctiveness and importance. It also means a narrowing of the religious education and experience of leaders in all aspects of society including the leadership of the churches.

Wittberg offers her study to sisters, deaconesses and mission society members as a help in their work of continuing to develop the meaning of their distinctive charisms. For those outside these communities of women she provides a clear and compelling explanation of a phenomenon we have all observed but not fully understood. The interviews and focus group comments do provide some insights into how and why changes in women's communities have been welcomed and celebrated by their members. Nevertheless, this analysis of change is ultimately a sad story of the "loss of identity, loss of intellectual focus, [and] loss of power." (255) Wittberg expertly leads us from piety to professionalism but leaves the challenge of creating a renewed theology of institutional religious virtuosity as a work of the future.

Prudence Moylan  
Loyola University Chicago

## **Announcements**

The Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR) will hold its 6<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference September 17-20, 2009, at the Clarion Hotel, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. For more information contact the national office by e-mail [acwr@juno.com](mailto:acwr@juno.com) or call 513-347-4048. The organization also has a web page [www.archivist-sacwr.org](http://www.archivist-sacwr.org).

Dominican women around the world now have a new home for research and historical study at the birth-place of the Order in Fanjeaux, France, just 2.5 km from the monastery of Prouilhe. Sponsored by Do-

minican Sisters International (DSI), S.H.O.P. (Sister Historians of the Order of Preachers) is in the process of creating a facility devoted to the history of Dominican women. Belgium's Barbara Beaumont, OP, leads the project which will offer hospitality to researchers and scholars. We owe this report to longtime HWR subscriber Mary Ewens, OP who continues her current ministry in Rome as director of Jubilee Community Centre, a residence for Sisters from developing countries who are studying in Rome. Ewens can be contacted at ewensop@yahoo.ie.

A number of communities celebrate significant anniversaries this year, among them the Sisters of Charity (BVMs) (1833-2008) who inaugurated their 175<sup>th</sup> celebration November 1, 2007; and the Sisters of the Visitation (VHM) in St. Louis, Missouri (1833-2008). The BVM celebration, designed to culminate on November 1, 2008, includes a 14-month calendar with quotations, photographs and a timeline; composition of original music; and publication of a brief history of the congregation. For more information, contact BVM ar-

chivist, Lauranne Lifka, BVM, at MLIFKA@bvmcong.org.

Marymount Manhattan College Archive mounted a Fall 2007 exhibit on religion at the college, highlighting the role of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) who began in 1936 to offer college-level courses to alumnae of their K-12 school located on New York's Fifth Avenue. Queries about using Marymount Manhattan's archive for the study of women religious in higher education, especially in New York City, can be directed to archivist Mary Elizabeth Brown at mbrown1@mmm.edu, or call 212-774-4817.

The American Catholic Historical Association (ACHA) will hold its spring meeting at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, April 3-5, 2008. Program committee chairman, Professor Cyriac K. Pullapilly, may be contacted for more information at pullapil@saintmary.edu or by calling him at 574-284-4473.

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### Subscription Information

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The ACHA annual meeting will convene in New York City on January 2-5, 2009, simultaneously with the annual meeting of the American Historical Association. More information is available on the ACHA from program chairman the Rev. Robert Bireley, SJ at rbirele@luc.edu.

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**Newsletter Deadline**

Please have the copy for the June 2008 issue to the Editor by May 1, 2008. KKennelly33@hotmail.com

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