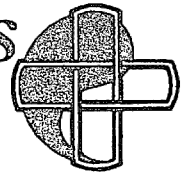

History of Women Religious News and Notes



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HWR NETWORK NEWS

The new Conference on the History of Women Religious website is up, WWW.CHWR.ORG. On it you will find useful information on the Conference including highlights of its history and membership profile, the complete text of book reviews from the last issue of HWR News and Notes, and information on the coming Triennial Conference at Scranton University, Scranton, Pennsylvania June 27-30, 2010. We are grateful to Judith Sutura, OSB, for her work in initiating the website. Comments are welcome, either to Judith at jsutura@mountosb.org or to the News and Notes editor at KKennelly33@hotmail.com.

The program committee for the coming Triennial conference invites paper and session proposals related to the theme, "Confronting Challenges: Women Religious Respond to Change." Studies may explore, among other themes and issues, the impact of change on congregational leadership, structures of governance, mission and ministry, membership, intercongregational cooperation, relations with other organizations, and the creation of new modes of affiliation. Proposals consisting of no more than 250 words accompanied by a one-page C.V. are due by July 15, 2009, to Margaret McGuinness, La Salle University, 1900 W. Olney Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19141, or by email to mcguinness@lasalle.edu. See the web page for the complete Call for Papers.

Just a reminder: please check your address label for your subscription due date, month/day/year. If the date does not appear we would appreciate hearing from you at KKennelly33@hotmail.com .

PUBLICATIONS

D. H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) documents the finding that the number of female readers was far greater throughout the Middle Ages than has been assumed, religious women playing a major role, after clerics and monks, as bearers of written culture during the period studied (c. 700-1500).

Julie Kerr, *Monastic Hospitality: The Benedictines in England, c. 1070-c.1250* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007) gives us the first comprehensive study of the subject. Documentary evidence from women's monasteries comes mainly from the thirteenth-century forward.

John J. Clune, Jr., *Cuban Convents in the Age of Enlightened Reform, 1761-1807* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), uses correspondence pertaining to the unreformed Havana convent of Santa Clara to explore such themes as how the creole elites used convents for political and economic purposes, how nuns, servants, and other lay residents experienced convent life, and how local conditions impacted convent functions during an era that involved the Haitian revolution and the Louisiana Purchase.

Colleen Gray, *The Congregation de Notre Dame, Superiors, and the Paradox of Power, 1693-1796* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007) draws on a rich array of Canadian and French archival sources to trace the history of the Congregation of Notre Dame, founded in Montreal by Marguerite Bourgeoys in 1657.

Paulinus Oakes, RSM, ed., *The Tapestry of Mercy: History of the Seven State St. Louis Region (Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas) To the Present of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas* (Privately printed by the Sisters of Mercy) provides a valuable archival historical record for future historians. Orders (\$20) may be placed with the Sisters of Mercy, 2039 N. Geyer Rd., St. Louis, MO 63131.

Catholicism in the American West: A Rosary of Hidden Voices, eds. Roberto R. Trevino and Richard V. Francaviglia (College Station, TX: publ. for the University of Texas at Arlington by A. & M University Press, 2007), includes an essay by HWR member, Anne M. Butler, "The Invisible Flock," probing the role of women religious in building the Church in the West.

Shawn Copeland, OP, "The Subversive Power of Love," (Notre Dame, IN: Saint Mary's College, Madeleva Lecture,

2008), contributes a fresh perspective on the person and influence of Henriette Delille, the free woman of color who founded the nation's second community of black religious, the Sisters of the Holy Family, in New Orleans c. 1842.

Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), illuminates the topic of Catholic women's public roles in an era of social reform.

The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious recent publication, *The Foundations of Religious Life: Revisiting the Vision* (Ave Maria Press, 2009), articulates in this collection of articles the perspective on religious life held by its member congregations.

Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, *The Religious Formation Conference 1954-2004* (St. Paul, MN: Good Ground Press, 2009), situates the renewal efforts of the Sister Formation Conference (1954--) and its successor organization, the RFC (1976--) within the context of wider movements in the mid-century and post-conciliar U.S. Church. Order directly from the Religious Formation Conference, 8820 Cameron Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (\$14.95).

Margaret A. Hogan, *Sister Servants: Catholic Women Religious in Antebellum Kentucky* (dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), examines the early history of the Sisters of Loretto, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, and the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine, especially their relations with the broader Catholic church and the Protestant community in Kentucky.

Recent journal articles of note:

James T. Carroll, "The Smell of the White Man Is Killing Us: Education and Assimilation Among Indigenous Peoples," *U. S. Catholic Historian* (27: 1, Winter 2009, pp. 21-48) includes among those whose educational philosophy and practices are examined the Grey Nuns of Montreal and Benedictine nuns. Also of relevance in this issue of the USCH, Mark G. Thiel, "Catholic Ladders and Native American Evangelization" (pp. 49-70); and Ross Enochs, "Native Americans on the Path to the Catholic Church: Cultural Crisis and Missionary Adaptation" (pp. 71-88).

Ann Marie Ryan, "Meeting Multiple Demands: Catholic Higher Education for Women in Chicago, 1911-1939,"

American Catholic Studies (120: 1, Spring 2009, pp. 1-26), examines the expansion of Catholic higher education for women with a focus on two colleges founded by women religious: St. Xavier College, and Mundelein College; and on two by men, DePaul University and Loyola University.

Regina Siegfried, ASC, "Religious Formation Conference: Education for Deepening Relationships: theological/com-munal/societal/cultural/ecological" (*ibid.*, pp. 55-71), traces the evolution of the RFC's perspective on education for new members of congregations and on-going theological education for formation directors as well as those in the formation process.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Ellen Whelan, OSF, is working on a play and documentary about *The Sisters' Story*, the history she authored on the Franciscans of St. Marys Hospital of Rochester, Minnesota (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, vol. 1, 1889-1939; and 2, 1939-1980, publ. 2002, 2007). She would welcome any tips regarding writing for theatre production and documentaries as she continues the "lifelong learning" process this project entails for her.

Mary Jeremy Daigler, RSM, is doing research for the writing of a history of the women's ordination movement (not the WOC organization only) in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church. She has a particular interest in the pre-Vatican II period; in the St. Joan's International Alliance; in local groups (especially west of the Mississippi) both pre- and post-Vatican II; and in hierarchy or clergy who were supportive of the issue personally or in their preaching or writing. Anecdotal and scholarly comments alike will be welcome. E-mail address: mjdaigler@comcast.net .

BOOK REVIEWS

Elizabeth M. Smyth, ed., *Changing Habits: Women's Religious Orders in Canada*. Ottawa: Novalis, 2007. Pp. 312 + 32 pp. of illustrations. \$32.95.

With the publication of *Changing Habits*, for the first time, researchers and members of the public interested in the consecrated life in Canada can get an overall survey in a single volume. Elizabeth M. Smyth and the twelve scholars involved in this project are to be commended for this publication which adds an important part to the growing body of research and publications regarding women religious in different parts of the world.

Thirteen essays, written by as many authors, plus a lengthy introduction, are gathered in *Changing Habits*. As with many collected essays, the contributions are very different in their methodological approach and topics covered because it allows the reader to have a prism-like view of this rich field of research. The introduction offers an informative bibliographical essay about the state of the Canadian research on women religious. Throughout the book, the main areas of women religious' work are discussed, namely education, health care, social service. But much more is covered than just what the nuns "do," since some essays reflect on a broad range of topics such as recruitment (MacDonald), the perception of nuns by "others," mainly Protestants (Sullivan), the relationship between built space and religious calling (Martin). Two sisters (representing two of the six Canadian congregations of St. Joseph) offer fascinating insights from their own experience as writer of congregational history (O'Reilly) or as student, then professor of theology (Leonard).

The book itself is beautifully produced. The use of tinted paper gives a rich feel to the finished product. The photographs are reproduced on glossy paper and added as a separate insert, which makes connecting them with each article a bit more complicated, but allows them to be reproduced sharply and clearly. The meticulous editorial work produced a high-quality text, at the same time worthy of seasoned scholars and eminently readable (which is an important consideration for the publishing house, Novalis not being a primarily scholarly one*).

In the introduction, the editor states that this collection of essays represents "a sampling" of the current research (p. 7). And while it does cover a lot of ground, there are still areas needing more research, or better diffusion of the discoveries already made, as the editor states clearly (p. 16-18). From a reading and brief analysis of the gathered essays, I will add some more ideas, building on the ones already offered.

Most of the orders studied were founded during the Ultramontane period of Canadian Church history (the 50 years starting at the beginning of the 1840s), representing a period of religious activism typical not only of the Canadian Church, but of Catholics in Europe and the United States as well. Many essays focus on the last two hundred years, especially on the period extending from the early 19th to the mid-20th century. The French and early British colonial periods need to be re-examined, not only in terms of the history of the orders present in Canada during this time, but also to better know and understand the spiritual and institutional

roots of many congregations founded later. Most of the congregations studied were either founded in Canada or became independent branches of groups established here; the role of Canadian sisters belonging to international orders is not addressed. Central Canada is predominant, with 7 out of 13 articles devoted to the life of congregations based in Quebec or Ontario. The continental Atlantic provinces, the cradle of English-language Canadian Catholicism, fare well too. But Newfoundland, with its distinctive Irish traditions, is conspicuously absent, and so is Prince Edward Island; and only one order located in the Prairie provinces (the Oblate Missionary Sisters, of Manitoba) is studied.

All the orders studied recruited women mostly with either a French or Irish background; there is no German, Ukrainian or Polish congregation represented. The members of these groups were also mostly involved in active, socially-useful work, in schools, universities, hospitals, dispensaries: there is nothing about the contemplative orders or missionary congregations (the Oblate Missionary Sisters got their name from their affiliation with the Oblates, and were not involved in foreign missions). Finally, all the orders represent the Catholic tradition: Buddhist nuns and some Anglican orders are mentioned (p. 16), but there is also much research to be done on deaconesses' group (Presbyterian, Methodist or Lutheran) and Orthodox convents.

Reviewing *Changing Habits* allowed me to reflect more broadly about three dimensions of scholarly research about women religious in general. The last one is more properly Canadian, the other two are more generally relevant.

There remains a need to replace the experience of women religious in the larger context of the Canadian and international Catholic church history. Many efforts have been made to connect the experience and the work of the sisters to its social and economic context. Much less attention has been given to placing the congregations within their institutional Church milieu. In *Changing Habits*, some authors emphasised this element, showing the gradual involvement of sisters in the field of theology (Leonard), situating the post-conciliar renewal efforts of a particular congregation in its larger Church context (Bruno-Jofré), or studying the complex relationships between sisters, priests and bishops (Gresko).

Also, there needs to be more emphasis on the properly spiritual dimension in the sisters' life, which is what differentiates women religious from lay teachers, nurses or lay workers--or does it? One essay in *Changing Habits* con-

nects this properly religious aspect of the sisters' life with its architectural manifestations (Martin). When will we read about how the Vincentian, Ursuline and Médaille spiritual traditions influenced the work of the teaching sisters? Or about the similarities and differences in the nursing traditions as practiced by the Grey Nuns, the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth?

In Canada, the "two solitudes" seem to still coexist while basically ignoring each other. In most essays in *Changing Habits*, there are very few references given to French-language scholarship (and vice versa in the French-language literature, I must sadly add). It is almost expected in the case of a study of the Sisters of Loretto, who worked exclusively in English (Lei). It's much more surprising in an essay on the Sisters of Saint Ann (Gresko), based in Quebec and who have been the object of a recent historical investigation (Louise Roy. *Les Soeurs de Sainte-Anne: un siècle d'histoire. 1900-1950*; and Augustine Prévost. *Histoire des soeurs de Sainte-Anne: 1950-1975*; both copublished by Éditions Paulines and the community, in 1992 and 2000 respectively). To paraphrase the Gospel: "Lisons-nous les uns les autres!"

These remarks are intended as suggestions for further investigation, not as a negative comment on what is already published. Indeed, *Changing Habits* will probably remain the reference work about the English-language Canadian scholarship on women religious for many years: by the breadth of its essays, by the different types of scholarship and methodological approaches it brings together, by the number of important congregations it brings into light (all but one of the English-speaking congregations counting more than 400 members in 1965, and many orders based in Quebec but working in other parts of Canada).

When one takes into account the amount of research that was published all over the world during the last 20 years, the old cliché "The nuns/sisters are absent from written history" is not true anymore. *Changing Habits* brings one more "brick" to this edifice. We can only hope that these authors, and many others, will continue to share their knowledge and understanding of Canadian vowed women.

Claude Auger
Dominican University College, Ottawa, Canada

*In the interest of full disclosure, this reviewer worked for 17 years as senior editor for Novalis, and still does occasional contract work for them.

The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women. Joan Mueller (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006). Pp. vi-x-182 \$40.00 cloth.

In *The Privilege of Poverty*, Franciscan Sister Joan Mueller artfully transports us back to a thirteenth century world especially known for its romantic trysts, dynastic feuds, and great saints. Within this environment she invites us to watch a serious drama unfold: the struggle of two Franciscan founding sisters, St. Clare of Assisi and the Bohemian princess, St. Agnes of Prague, to gain papal affirmation for the austere Franciscan rule they had initiated. The struggles they faced were exacerbated within a society deliberately structured to build protective walls around its women. Despite the legal and canonical strictures that drastically confined them as well as the geographic distance that separated them, the two saintly women constantly urged their case. Both longed to establish the same radical rule that St. Francis espoused. Like him, each longed to be one with the "Poor Christ," possessing nothing either for themselves or for the monasteries they founded.

Mueller shows us how much their insistence upon this radical aim disturbed both Pope Gregory IX and his successor, Innocent IV. That these women desired to maintain monasteries that did not depend upon landed endowments was unthinkable to them. This kind of arrangement, they believed, was essential for the long-term security of women's congregations. Thus, both popes insisted that the nuns included mitigating clauses in their rule. In the many letters exchanged, it is apparent that Clare and Agnes continued to resist such requests. If required to own property, the women argued, they would fail to live the Franciscan spiritual imperative, the "privilege of poverty." Only through this right could they divest themselves of prestige and influence. Only in this way, could they truly identify with the suffering poor and be recognized as one among the poor. Only in this way, could they be truly free. St. Clare's deathbed scene, as she finally received papal approval for the radical aim they pursued, symbolically displayed their victory. Franciscan legend reports the scene: Clare pressing the approved constitution to her lips and lovingly kissing it.

Mueller's insistence upon the women's commitment to St. Francis's pristine ideal makes this study particularly provocative. By providing a medieval definition surrounding the meaning of poverty, she highlights an aspect of the vow that today receives insufficient attention. For these women,

poverty meant something unique, namely, freedom from land ownership and family ties. Perhaps Mueller's emphasis on this aspect of early Franciscan understandings is exaggerated. Yet it may indeed help today's followers of Francis gain fresh insights into their cherished vow. Because Mueller helps us understand the original and radical meaning of Franciscan poverty, this monograph makes an excellent contribution to all who are in ongoing dialogue concerning the vows and the future of religious life. For this reason as well as for its fine descriptions, carefully researched, and well written analysis, I strongly recommend this monograph.

Dolores Liptak, RSM,
Holy Apostles College and Seminary, Cromwell, Connecticut

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HWR sympathizes with the Sisters of Mercy over the death of Mary Felicitas Powers, RSM on April 8. A distinguished educator and professional archivist *par*

excellence, she was very active in assisting Sisters of Mercy communities in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and the United States, as well as some 35 other congregations, in the establishment and organization of their archives. She also served as archivist for the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Diocese of Savannah. She will be sorely missed.

We extend our sympathy also to the Holy Union Sisters over the death April 9 of long-time HWR Conference member, Grace Donovan, SUSC. An educator, community leader, author, and archivist, she served in the latter capacity for the Fall River province of her community from 1979 to 1999. To that office she added that of congregational archivist for the Holy Union Sisters in Rome beginning in 1997, and for the newly-formed U.S. Province in 1999. Her keen interest in HWR affairs and readiness to take on challenges in the archival field will be missed by her sisters and colleagues.

The LCWR exhibit, "Women and Spirit," opened at the Cincinnati Museum Center in May. It will be touring through 2012 and will be at The Women's Museum in

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Dallas, the Smithsonian, Ellis Island, and the Mississippi River Museum in Dubuque, Iowa. Exhibit directors are in discussion regarding open tour slots with a number of other American History museums including the Chicago Historical Society, the Constitution Center, The Heinz Museum, the Missouri Historical Society, Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, and the California Museum of History, Women, and the Arts in Sacramento. For current information see the exhibit website www.womenandspirit.org.

Newsletter Deadline

Please have copy for the **October 2009 issue** to the Editor by **September 1, 2009**. KKennelly33@hotmail.com.

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