

Ann M. Harrington, BVM, "Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: The Philadelphia Connection, 1883-1843," *U.S. Catholic Historian* (27:4, Fall 2009), 17-30, clarifies the circumstances surrounding the immigration of Mary Clark and companions from Ireland to the U.S. and their ensuing struggle to found a canonically approved congregation based in the frontier river town of Dubuque, Iowa.

Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, "An Immigrant Drama: The College of St. Catherine and Phi Beta Kappa," *U.S. Catholic Historian* (28:3, Summer 2010, in press), describes the backgrounds and motivations of the founding Sister-faculty at this Midwest women's college (now St. Catherine University), the first Catholic institution of higher learning in the U.S. whose faculty was awarded a chapter of the nation's most prestigious honor society, in 1936.

Fernanda Perrone, "Gone and Forgotten? New Jersey's Catholic Junior Colleges," *American Catholic Studies* (Summer 2010), 31-64, explores the "rise and fall" of eleven colleges established in the 1960s by congregations of women and of men based in New Jersey for the education of their newly professed members. Only two survived the 1970s, one as a four-year liberal arts college and the other, Assumption College for Sisters, continuing to fulfill its original purpose.

Diane Batts Morrow, "'To My Darlings, the Oblates, Every Blessing': The Reverend John T. Gillard, S.S.J., and the Oblate Sisters of Providence," *U.S. Catholic Historian* (28: 1, Winter 2010), 1-26, pays tribute to the inspiration she derived early in her scholarly career from Cyprian Davis, OSB, to whom this issue of the USCH is dedicated, with an illuminating study of the Sisters during the years (1930-1942) Josephite priest, John T. Gillard, served as the Sisters' chaplain. Also of special relevance to the history of women religious in this issue: M. Shawn Copeland, "Building up a Household of Faith: Dom Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., and the Work of History," 53-63; and Cecilia A. Moore, "Conversion Narratives: The Dual Experiences and Voices of African American Catholic Converts," 27-40.

Response to the Word: The Memoirs and Writings of Annamarie Cook, SLW, compiled by the Sisters of the Living Word and Staff (Privately printed, 2010), uses interviews with foundress, Annamarie Cook, to articulate a moving first-person account of steps leading to separation of some 90 women from the Sisters of Christian Charity and formation of a new congrega-

tion, the Sisters of the Living Word, in 1975. For more information on this publication, contact Mary Ann Zrust, ma.zrust@att.net.

Irene Mahoney, OSU, *Encounters: A Book of Memories* (AuthorHouse, 2010), describes this charming work as a memoir with a difference, "not chronological nor complete" but rather "a book of reflective memories—memories which rise up with startling resonance despite the blur of time." Recipient of the HWR Distinguished Historian Award in 2007, Mahoney welcomes the reader into her rich life as an Ursuline, a scholar, and a prolific writer with a bibliography to her credit spanning the genres of history, historical biography, novels, dramas, and reflective essays.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Kathleen Sprows Cummings, associate director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame, will be conducting research and writing on the topic of the canonization of American saints during her forthcoming sabbatical.

Shannon Dee Williams, doctoral candidate at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, is the recipient of a research travel grant from the Cushwa Center to facilitate use of Notre Dame's archival collections relating to her thesis topic, "Subversive Habits: Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World War I." The paper she delivered at the Scranton conference in June, "'Nothing is Too Good for Youth of Our Race': Black Nuns and the Struggle for Catholic Education in the Jim Crow South," afforded an intriguing glimpse into what promises to be a valuable contribution to the history of Black women religious.

An essay by Regina Bechtle, SC, and Judith Metz, SC, "Elizabeth Bayley Seton Writings: Current State and Future Plans," in *Vincentian Heritage* (29, 2009), 24-33, Provides a useful guide to the research agenda stimulated by the 200th anniversary (1809-2009) of the founding of the Sisters of Charity in the U.S. Progress continues to be made in the editing and publication of Seton's writings, most recently, Ellin M. Kelly's "Elizabeth Bayley Seton's Commonplace Book of Poetry Archives, St. Joseph Provincial House, Rare Book 31," *Vincentian Heritage* (29, 2009), 35-131.

Mary Anne Zrust, SLW, intends to expand her research on the founder of the Sisters of the Living

Word, Annamarie Cook, into a comprehensive history of the congregation, making use of a research technique presented by Dan and Kathy Vaillancourt at the Scranton conference in a paper entitled "Preserving the Legacy of American Women Religious Through the Memoir Art Form." Their book on the subject, *Writing and Righting the Past: Preserving the Legacy of American Women Religious Through Memoir*, is available as an online text from www.memoirforchange.org. To request a hard copy contact them at dvailla@luc.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life 1450-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, paperback edition, 2008. Pp. 301.

Nuns by Silvia Evangelisti offers a concise glimpse into the life of nuns and the role of convents within society from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The author, a historian at the University of East Anglia, explores the relationships between clergy and nuns, the pursuit of art, music and writing from inside the walls, the complexities of enclosure, and the emergence of active communities. Throughout her study Evangelisti stresses that convents functioned in a reciprocal relationship with the outside world; consequently living in a religious house did not preclude nuns from exercising influence beyond their convents.

For many who became nuns the social contacts of the cloister often replicated their former lives with siblings, aunts, and cousins already resident in the convent. Aside from the spiritual motivation for entering the convent, however, dowry requirements were less expensive than providing marriage dowries. Not every nun willingly chose the convent. A comment from *Monastic Hell* written by a seventeenth century Venetian nun captures the desperation of young women "placed" in convents by their families: "...enforced nuns experience in their lives all the pains of hell..."

Evangelisti discusses the ambiguity that underlay the confessor-nun relationship, pointing out that although Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* was written as an act of obedience to her confessor, some confessors exerted control by destroying nuns' manuscripts. Yet, as Evangelisti notes, nuns could provide counsel, thus "establishing with their confessors relationships of mutual spiritual exchange."

The author synthesizes the various steps that formalized enclosure for women religious from the thirteenth

century mandates of Boniface VIII to the pronouncements at Trent in the sixteenth century, linking each to "deeply misogynistic ideas about women." Within the bounds of enclosure a restructuring of convent space was designed to ensure visual as well as physical separation. However, the construction of elaborate parlors allowed nuns to interact, albeit through fairly large grilles, with visitors from outside including small theatrical troupes invited to perform for presumably an appreciative enclosed audience.

Evangelisti traces avenues of interaction between nuns and the outside world through music and art. "Angelic voices" linked the nuns to their immediate environs, with locals delighting in the music that arose from within the walls. Nuns clearly prized musical gifts in prospective entrants, offering discounted dowries to those with such ability. But it may have been convent art that generated more immediate recognition for artistically talented nuns since some of their works were sent outside for public display.

Frequently paintings focused on a mystic marriage with images of Christ and a female saint standing as a "metaphor for the monastic condition...displayed in order to facilitate identification of the nuns' role as 'brides of Christ.'" Evangelisti gives some attention to the spiritual friendships that were "a constant feature of Catholic spirituality," noting one "spiritual couple" in particular, Vincent de Paul (d.1660) and Louise de Marillac (d.1660) who founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633. In her discussion of the Daughters the author cites a study compiled in 1975 that provides data on the houses and members of this community. Seemingly a more recent data base would have been available.

By the mid-seventeenth century active organizations grew while enthusiasm for contemplative and enclosed communities waned. Increasingly urbanization highlighted the need for poor relief and the care of the displaced. The thin line between the elites who ran convents and the elites who ran the outside world remained. Even with the formation of newer communities class distinctions were retained, with well-off girls attending boarding schools and poorer girls accessing the day schools.

Convents were among the institutions transported to North America with seventeenth colonial expansion. In New France enclosure proved to be an impediment to the missionary effort. Discussion of the new world is marred somewhat by the inadvertent suggestion

that an illustrated nineteenth century prayer book from the native Micmac people of Nova Scotia might owe its origins to the Quebec Ursulines.

Nevertheless, *Nuns* succeeds in portraying a period when convents were integrated into the social and political life of their time. As such, this study may suggest that present and future forms of religious life can and may continue only if they are, or are seen to be, integral to the larger society.

Elizabeth W. McGahan
University of New Brunswick, Saint John Campus

Margaret Brennan, IHM, *What Was There for Me Once: A Memoir*. Toronto/Montréal: Novalis, 2009. Pp. 191.

She looked at me and rolled her eyes. Margaret Brennan had just suggested that I might consider doing doctoral work. I protested that my leadership might think otherwise. She rolled her eyes. I took a deep breath, spoke to my leadership, and finished doctoral work in 1985.

This was Margaret Brennan. There was no pressure, no arm twisting. She offered possibility and hope. First her own sisters and then I, a Dominican living with her for that privileged year, would never be the same. Nor would the institutions of learning be the same that would eventually invite these women, trained in specific areas of theology, to be part of their teaching faculties.

Thomas C. Fox did a fine review of *What Was There for Me Once* by Margaret in the February 19, 2010 issue of *The National Catholic Reporter*. He wrote as a layman of the historical impact of religious women after Vatican II, and of Margaret's contribution in particular. My own reflections on Margaret's *Memoir* is that of one inside religious life and after twenty-five years of teaching theology, initiated in large part by this woman with the velvet hammer.

For many religious women, reading Margaret's *What Was There for Me Once* will be a treasured walk down memory lane. Many of us have walked it at her side. This *Memoir* is a sober recall of the intense struggle of creativity that blossomed forth from women's religious communities after the Council, and that still is very much alive. I think this is the purpose for which Margaret writes. She is still rolling her eyes. Her wisdom in taking us down

memory lane at this time is her way of telling us to believe in ourselves. She is not naïve about what we face as women religious. The deeply prayerful and courageous decisions made by religious women in the United States are under investigation. It remains to be seen whether the decisions of these communities will be encouraged as authentic readings of the signs of the times or condemned as brazen and arrogant.

What is written between the lines of this *Memoir*? What is it that Margaret is telling us? I offer five insights, one drawn from each of her chapters. First, Margaret tells us that amidst the "mess" there is life. We need to be reminded that Providence has worked with our foolishness before and has turned it to good. Second, Vatican II was an outburst of hope, and no amount of back-peddling will put that fresh, minty toothpaste back in the tube. Religious women, and dare I say the wider Catholic community, has glimpsed what the Church can be, and the startling vision is of God, the reign of God, and a renewed human community free from violence, discrimination, and war. Third, we have turned a corner in ministry. As religious women we are no longer called to simply cover the bases. We are called to form the laity to become all they can be. We are to authentically "sister" them into the cutting edge vanguard of the Church which they are. Fourth, Margaret calls us to be ready to have the vision change shape before our very eyes. She was shaping others to full potential as a congregational leader and she later found herself shaping others for twenty-five years as a graduate professor. Finally, she rests her case in that deep spirituality which has served her well all her life. She calls us to the "singleness of eye," to knowing the one thing necessary. She calls us to depth and simplicity of life.

Margaret presupposes we too have caught the vision. In her usual way, the way of the velvet hammer, she twists no arms, raises no hackles. But the call of the *Memoirs* is unavoidable. In her eighties she is still shaping us, quietly calling us forth...for the long haul in hope.

Carla Mae Streeter, OP
Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, MO

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A Call for Papers has been issued for the conference, "Consecrated Women: Identities, Organizations and Exile," set to convene June 23-25, 2011, at Queen

Mary, University of London. Co-sponsored by the 'Who Were the Nuns?' Project and the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland (H-WRBI), the conference welcomes papers on consecrated women from all historical periods and from different religious traditions. Please submit a one page abstract of no more than 300 words by 30 November 2010, stating the title of the paper at the top and at the end listing name, institutional affiliation or city, contact information, and whether you are a postgraduate student. Further details are available from Dr. Caroline Bowden: c.bowden@qmul.ac.uk ; and Dr. Carmen M. Mangion: c.mangion@bbk.ac.uk ; as well as on the H-WRBI web site at <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/bedford-centre/history-women-religious/> .

Anyone wishing to join Sistory, an email list devoted to the history of women religious is invited to contact Regina Siegfried, ASC, at reginasiegfried@charter.net . She will be happy to add your name to the list.

The Cushwa Center is pleased to announce the release of a newly designed web site. Visitors to the old URL (www.nd.edu/~cushwa) will be directed to the

new site but please note that going forward the new address is <http://cushwa.nd.edu/> .

The traveling exhibit "Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America" opened September 23 at the Statue of Liberty national Monument/ Ellis Island Immigration Museum, Liberty Island, New York. It closes there January 22, 2011. Venues during the remainder of its three-year touring life include the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, Dubuque, Iowa; Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California; the Center for History, in association with the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana; and The California Museum of History, Women, and the Arts in Sacramento. For schedule details see the exhibit web site at www.womenandspirit.org/new.html .

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Karen M. Kennelly, Editor
HWR News and Notes
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2401 Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, Editor
KKennelly33@hotmail.com

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1880 Randolph Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55105

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