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 mailing 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 KKemelly33@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


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: Asuncion Lavrin, “Female Visionaries and Spirituality;” and Mónica Díaz, “The Indigenous Nuns of Corpus Christi: Race and Spirituality.” Asuncion Lavrin 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Universidad Autónoma de Puebla and Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, 2006), have co-edited a collection of largely unpublished texts covering four centuries of writings by nuns and beatas from Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic.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* (Vincentian 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 Vincentian Studies Institute at 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 Orleans 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 Religious network are contributors to *Changing Habits, Women's Religious Orders in Canada*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Smyth (Novalis Publishing, Toronto, 2007). In addition 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 congregational history; and Rosa Bruno-Jofre, on the renewal process as experienced by the Missionary Oblate Sisters 1963-1989.

Sharon C. Knecht, *Oblate Sisters of Providence: A Pictorial 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, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556.


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).


**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.

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.


Book Review


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 100th 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


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 ade-
quately 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 spon-

Wittberg provides a sociological explanation of the
changes in religious societies of women as a conse-
quence of their separation from their original insti-
tutional 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 vari-
ety of works chosen by individual members. This has
also made recruitment more difficult since potential
members no longer have the opportunity to experi-
ence 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 com-
mon 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 train-
ing of members focuses more on professional qualifica-
tions and work itself increases the strength of profes-
sional 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 soci-
ety 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 influ-
ence 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 denomina-
tion. 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 them-
selves 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 distinct-
ive charisms. For those outside these communities of
women she provides a clear and compelling explana-
tion 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 6th Triennial Conference Sep-
tember 17-20, 2009, at the Clarion Hotel, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin. For more information contact the national
office by e-mail acwr@juno.com or call 513-347-4048.
The organization also has a web page 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-
Dominican 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 175th 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 archivist, 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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News item for _HWR News and Notes_, Recent Publication, Research, Interests, etc.
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.

**Newsletter Deadline**

Please have the copy for the June 2008 issue to the Editor by May 1, 2008. KKnelly33@hotmail.com

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