(The Golding Centre is situated within the Faculty of Theology of the Australian Catholic University and is named to honour the women Annie and Belle Golding and their married sister Kate Dwyer women of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whose activism was underpinned by wide reading and in-depth research. Writing and public speaking were integral to their efforts to promote political and social reform. All three women were committed Catholics.)

# golding sml logo.jpg EDITORIAL

For numerous decades it has been documented in women’s history that domestic activities are rated lowly. Because of their nature many traditional women’s activities such as cooking and needlecraft, although vital to the welfare of humanity, appeared to be ephemeral and were quickly forgotten and little valued by scholars. The nourishing food prepared and presented in an inviting way, the production of a pleasant, comfortable environment through various arts and crafts have been largely taken over by manufacturing industries.

Women activists and historians have long been conscious of this devaluing of the domestic as expressed by the USA writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) in such of her works as *Women and Economics*, *The Home* and *His Religion and Hers.* The first of these was published in 1898 to immediate acclaim and went through seven English language editions as well as being translated into seven other languages but soon drifted into obscurity, being of little interest to the men scholars.

Annie Golding resonated with Charlotte’s awareness of the paramount importance of the activities that took place in the home in her paper “The Industrial and Social Conditions of Women in the Australian Commonwealth” presented in Sydney at the 1909 Australasian Catholic Congress. In this paper Annie pointed out: “Domestic duties have not been considered of sufficient importance to devise means to raise them to a more dignified status …” She observed: “The State universities have done much for the higher education of women but they are the worst offenders in regard to domestic science training …” She went on: “In the scheme of University reform so long and consistently urged by the Women’s Progressive Association of New South Wales, a Chair of Domestic Science was one of the most important reforms advocated …” Annie lamented: “It is very disappointing that in the University Reform Bill now before the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales … provision has not been made for a Chair of Domestic Science.”

While there has been considerable documentation of the exploitation of women workers in the homes of the middle and upper classes and in such industries as dressmaking and millinery in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and in the clothing industry practice of “piece work” by women in their homes in the late 20th century, there is emerging again a growing discussion of the value of the so-called domestic arts and fine arts such as tapestry. In schools and universities the area of textiles has subsumed such domestic arts as needlework. A century later than Annie Golding, Dr Louise DuVernet, lecturer in textile technology at the Australian Catholic University, contributes to this discourse in her doctoral studies on the factors that shape the valuing of textile education in secondary schools and, as you will see in her brief feature piece in this newsletter, comes up with some interesting findings.

# Golding Centre Colloquia Report, 2009

The Golding Centre held its eighth annual colloquia on Saturday 18 April on the Strathfield Campus. At the First Colloquium Dr Catherine Thom rsj presented a most interesting work in progress paper entitled ‘Two women, two men, two lives’ in which she compared and contrasted the lives of Cornelia Connolly, the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Child Jesus, and Mary Mackillop, the founder of the Australian Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. Dr Rosa MacGinley pbvm led the following conversation. The challenge of not committing the error of “presentism” in reading the past in the light of contemporary culture was underlined in this conversation as well as the related challenge of providing an adequate historical context for the subject being researched.

The second colloquium paper was presented by Dr Trish Madigan op who spoke to her doctoral thesis which explored the impact of fundamentalism on women’s lives and their responses to it in Roman Catholicism and Sunni Islam. There was an awareness that each of these religions spanned a world-wide, culturally diverse, patriarchal community. Pauline Rae smsm from the Columban Institute, who has been a leader for many years in the field of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Australia, led the conversation. The common problems facing these women were highlighted as well as the complexity of making generalisations concerning such issues as the wearing of the veil.

At the third colloquium Dr Damian Gleeson (Notre Dame University) shared in-sights from his doctoral thesis “The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare, 1920-1985’. The following conversation was led by Dr Par Hansen, Head of the School of Social Work, ACU. There was much matter for discussion in Dr Gleeson’s wide-ranging research tracing the complex story of the development of modern Catholic social welfare, which was inspired by professionally trained lay women. These women emerged as challenging mentors in the vision they showed in introducing new policies and practices across the uncoordinated Australian Catholic welfare sector. The ongoing tension between the professional and volunteer emerged as a matter demanding attention.

It was noticeable that every conversation resulted in an issue being articulated which drew the observation: “and that is the subject for another thesis”! This colloquia day is designed to celebrate and share the fruits of research and in so doing to contribute to both the development of a research culture within ACU and the countering of the tendency to anti-intellectualism in the wider Australian community generally. To date paper presenters and conversation leaders have featured representatives from the ACU Schools of Theology, Nursing, Exercise Science, Religious Education, and Social Work. From the wider community presenters and conversation leaders have staff or doctoral graduates from the Australian National University and the Universities of Sydney, New South Wales, Macquarie, Notre Dame Australia and Ballarat as well as the Catholic Institute of Sydney, the Broken Bay Institute, and the Columban Institute.

Connecting the Disconnected Through Textiles

In a time of increased discussion about the importance of developing spiritual wellbeing (Gardener, 1990; Dyer, 1992; Hall, 1999; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006) it is important for the value of textile activities to be recognised and more effectively promoted in the schools for spiritual development. As there is no definition of spirituality given by the Board of Studies in NSW, for the purpose of this paper the term “spiritual” will be used as defined in the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA, 1996), United Kingdom (UK), discussion paper on “Spiritual and Moral Development”. This paper defines the term spiritual as:

applying to something fundamental in the human condition which is not necessarily experienced through the physical senses and/or expressed through everyday language … It has to do with the universal search for individual identity – with our responses to challenging experiences such as death, suffering, beauty and encounters with good and evil. It is to do with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which to live.

There is emerging in the literature concerning textile education evidence of an awareness of the contribution of the subject to the development of the self-esteem of students as well as their comfort with their cultural identity. To contribute toward this positive development I commenced with RMIT University a doctoral thesis titled: “The value of Textile Education in Secondary Schools in NSW: Process Stages of Revitalisation beyond 2010.”

This research developed out of my belief in the value of textile education in providing an opportunity to quieten and focus the mind on the God-given power of the creative self to heal and change one’s personal situation. By textile education I refer to all fibre-based creative activities that involve the creation of objects from textile materials including apparel and fashion design, costume, home furnishings, textile art and personal gifts – described by some as fabric craft (Stalker, 2005).

Of particular interest to me were the value of textile education in bridging a cultural divide between migrant students and the schools and its importance to students of all abilities for promoting their development and expression of creativity. I appreciated too that textile studies’ link to history, culture and creativity position it well for the role of developing spiritual awareness and self-confidence.

Hall (2004) claims that “creativity, imagination making, and appreciation are spiritual in nature and contain elements of spirituality” (p144). Hall also argued that the experiences of making and responding to art are essential to our spiritual wellbeing, and that learning, as a creative process, is also spiritual in nature. Significantly the only reference to creativity in the Home Economics syllabuses in Australia is in the textile sections with the exception of NSW where there is no reference at all. Textile education in NSW is now firmly placed in the Technology Learning Area with a stronger focus on commercially viable production. Yet in the context of human need, self-expression and development of identity through textile-based activities need to be nurtured for their possible future assistance with the management of stress and depression in society.

The value of textile craft is not in doubt among occupational therapists and nursing practitioners in the management of stress and preservation of identity through the recovery from serious illness (Predeger, 1996; Reynolds, 2003; Schmid, 2005). But the attitude and indifference or negativity of teachers and educational systems to its future in secondary schools will bring about its demise unless its obvious benefits can be made known to a wider community.

A different perspective is expressed by Stalker (2005) who stated that she was “intrigued by the invisibility of these areas (fabric, craft and fashion) as worthy of research and as a suitable base from which to foster women’s learning and authority” (p12). Stalker claimed that the study of fabric crafts was “demeaned” because they locate women as the prime knowers and experts … and areas where women can have an authoritative voice, experience the power of having extensive legitimate and valuable knowledge.

My study, however, aimed to inform the home economics technology educators and the wider secondary education community of the value of the study of textiles in addressing the need of emotional and spiritual well being.

 A mini research

As a minor part of my research I carried out the following experiment. I had become aware of reports of a growing number of girls with behavioural problems in government secondary schools. In my local government high school twelve female students had been excluded from sport because of their lack of cooperation with teachers and other students and were spending each sport afternoon in detention. In a hope to try my theories of the contribution textiles makes to the development of self-esteem and reconnecting the disconnected, I commenced a project that would allow the students to gain some exercise to raise awareness of their bodies and minds and follow the exercise with creative textile activities. The program was titled “Creativity through mind and body” and aimed at developing the girls’ good nature through exercises of contemplation and creative textiles activities. The students varied in their textiles skills. Some had been taught to sew by their grandmothers but the majority lacked fine motor skills and confidence to attempt the activities offered.

Each session commenced with consideration of the theme for the afternoon. The activities included the mind and body exercises followed by a task that was related to the theme. The first week the task was quite simple and every student completed the task and had something special to take home for her efforts. It became increasingly clear that the difference in ability between the students would have to be allowed for in the choice of activities each week. There was no pressure, and no official assessment. The following table outlines the themes and related textile activity.

Themes and activities for Creativity through mind and body

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Theme | Textile Activity |
| Always keep something beautiful in your heart | A heart shaped fabric envelop in the shape of a heart that the students could use to hold a fond thought or a wish.Activity inspired by Flossie Pietsch |
| Growing the goodness of heart | A scarf for teddy. French knitting on toilet roll and paddle pop sticks.  |
| The Mind / heart connection | Learning to knit on needles or pretty bookmark using skills developed in first week |
| Do your feet bring good news? | Silly socks – colouring white socks with shibori techniques. |
| Friendship | Appliqued heart – introduction to patchwork |
| Community – the power of one | Mini community friendship quilt |
| Community – making a difference |
| Actions speak louder than words | Marbling and decorating baby singlets |
| Strengthening the community | Felting with sushi mats |
| Precious little makes a difference | Making purses from the handmade felt |
| Symbols of friendship | Beaded friendship bracelet |

Over the period of the project there was a marked improvement in the attitude of the girls to themselves and others. It was clear that the activities had a calming effect upon the girls connecting their interior and exterior worlds.

Comment

As a model for social development for disconnected students, I would like to see this outcome tested with a cohort of girls and a cohort of boys with a steady development of their choice of skills in knitting or sewing or felting for the development of a quilt or blanket that will become a symbol of their journey of social development over a twelve month period. This would be a project in the tradition of the blanket embroidered by the soldier in the German concentration camp or the convict women during the colonisation of Australia (Gero, 2000); their textiles activities would become a symbol of their journey to reconnection.

In conclusion

From my major study of the perceptions of textiles teachers, head teachers, secondary textiles students and technology student teachers of the benefits of textile education it was found that textiles education provides students with the following:

\* an opportunity for holistic learning where they can reflect on their links to the history of previous ages through traditional craft activities

* a connection to their cultural ancestry through costume and traditional textiles artefacts
* a reason to stay at school to complete their senior secondary education
* an opportunity to reflect on their responsibilities to protect the environment and develop compassion for people in need
* a means by which students can relax in times of stress and identify with a source of pleasure (textiles activity) which can help them reach away from illness, loss, or depression and move towards the development of wellbeing
* an opportunity to express themselves creatively in the way they clothe themselves and decorate their homes to help them develop a true sense of self that allows for both spiritual and cultural growth
* access to the latest technology that may not have been accessed otherwise such as virtual exhibitions, computer aided design and computer linked manufacture
* an opportunity to achieve despite having limited success in other studies.

It is also important to note that, in relation to the heightened sense of the need for schools to be connected to their local communities (Palmer, 1999), there is evidence in the research that by valuing textiles from various cultures in the community opportunities are created to strengthen school-community links. There follows dialogue with parents that may not otherwise be offered. This can contribute to the parents and relatives of the student being affirmed in their awareness of their inner worth which sets the spirit free (Millman, 1998). Mothers, aunts and grandmothers, can feel proud and honoured that they are in a position to contribute to the spiritual development of their young people.

In summary

Textile studies’ links to history, culture and creativity position it well for the role of developing spiritual awareness and self confidence. Textiles and design teachers need to claim their rightful role in building school morale and making sure future Australians have the skills to apply to their daily lives for relaxation and contemplation, social situations, and use in employment or as informed consumers.

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Letter from London

Researchers of women religious of Britain and Ireland are looking forward eagerly to their conference at the historic Bar Convent at York, 18-19 September, 2009. This conference with the general theme, “Consecrated Women: Crossing Boundaries” invited papers and panel proposals on the history of women religious of Britain and Ireland focussing on the following sub-themes: internationalism, gendered spaces, the specificity of place, and relationships between the centre and peripheries.

The range of papers and presenters is impressive as indicated by the following sample:

“Secular perspectives on female consecration in the published plays of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73): ‘My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint but a place for freedom’ (The Convent of Pleasure Act 1 scence2)”, Gweno Williams, St John University, York.

“Virgo Becomes Virago’: Secular Women in the Service of the Early Modern English Mission”, Laurence Lux-Sterritt, LERMA, Aix-Marseille University, France.

“Cross Cultural and Ideological Boundaries in Elizabeth Gaskell’s ‘The Poor Clare’”, Raphael Ingelbien, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

“ Irish Catholic Diaspora in the 19th Century: The Life Story of Mother Josephine of the Sacred Heart”, Susanne Malchau Dietz, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

“Forging an international union of Religious sisters: Case study of the Presentation Sisters, c1900-1976,” Louise O’Reilly, National University of Ireland, Maynooth,

“‘The Irish make better nuns’ …fom Callan to Tasmania: The Irish shaping of an Australian Congregation”, Josephine Brady rsj, Australian Catholic University, Canberra.

“Gendered Spaces: Catholic Hospitals and Reproductive Healthcare in the United States”, Barbara Mann Wall, University of Pennsylvania.

“The Convent as Cultural Conduit: Irish Matronage in Early Modern Spain”, Andrea Knox, Northumbria University.

There will be at the Conference the British launch of Pauline (Francine) Shaws’s book *Elizabeth Hayes*: *Pioneering Franciscan Journalist*, published by Gracewing, UK. This book is based on Pauline’s doctoral thesis (Golding Centre, Australian Catholic University, 2006).

The ongoing major project “Who are the Nuns?” initiated by Professor Caroline Bowden (Royal Holloway College, University of London) has created much interest and is well underway. This project will make a comprehensive study of the membership of the English convents and the English members of Mary Ward’s Institute established during the period when they were proscribed in England. These institutions with more than 3.650 (mainly English) members were all founded in exile in continental Europe. They have been little studied by historians and their documents and activities have remained largely unknown.

 Most (twenty-two) were enclosed convents while a further ten (mainly smaller) houses were founded by Mary Ward and her followers. They were not, however, isolated from the world: their contacts and networks spread widely. The nuns built substantial convents and schools; they commissioned works of art and music, and they created important libraries and centres of learning for women.

 The research will carry out a full survey of surviving documents in conventual and public archives. Personal details of members of the convents and their network of supporters will be extracted for entry into a relational data database for qualitative analysis. The two databases will be linked to combine quantitative and qualitative analysis using tested techniques in a new way.

 The team is led by Michael Questier as director and Caroline Bowden as project manager. Katharine Keats-Rohan and Jan Broadway are responsible for developing the technical aspects of the project. Two Belgian Research Officers, Katrien Daemen De Gelder and Pascal Majerus will work on continental archival material. The project will both demonstrate the important role of the English convents in Europe and also provide sources, data and specialised knowledge for other scholars and interested researchers. (Project website [**http://wwtn.history**](http://wwtn.history/)**.qmul.ac.uk/index.html)**

**Dr Carmen Mangion**

 **Birkbeck College, University of London.**

Forthcoming Conferences

Religion Revisited: Women’s Rights and the Political Instrumentalism of Religion, Berlin, Germany, 5-6 June 2009

This conference is part of the research project “Religion, Politics and Gender Equality”. The convenors have invited scholars and feminist activists from Germany, India, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, United Kingdom and the United States to discuss the question of how to deal with religions in the fight for women’s rights and gender equality.

Is the strict separation of religion and politics a requirement for women’s rights and gender equality? OR can they be realised in the context of public religions? Are religious movements allies or threats in the struggle for women’s rights? These questions and others will be addressed at the upcoming conference.

 For more information see http://www.unrisd.org

Religion, Belief and Superstition, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester, 8-9 June, 2009

This conference seeks to explore the boundaries of religion, belief and superstition, examining the diverse and often ambiguous ways in which religions, beliefs and superstitions become central to the ways in which peoples define and understand themselves and their communities. Moreover what methodological presuppositions do 21st century medieval scholars bring to the study of religions and beliefs?

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Women and Religion in Britain c. 1660-1760, St Hilda’s College, Oxford, 25-27 June, 2009

This conference is being sponsored by the Centre for Early Modern British and Irish History and the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford. The convenors point out that religion has become increasingly important to our understanding of the dynamics of late 17th and early 18th century British society. Recent historical scholarship has explored the complex ways in which resurgent Anglicanism constructed itself. It has illustrated the vibrancy of Dissent, tracing the changing culture of Catholic recusancy, and examined the intersecting commitments of nonjurors, Jacobites and Tories. Possibly because of the interest in the “politicisation” of religion, research has inevitably focused on male politicians, clergymen and preachers with writers shaping the religious life of the period. Literary studies of women’s writing after the Restoration, while often privileging intellectual concerns such as the emergence of feminism or sexual identities over religious content, have done much to reveal the vivid world of female piety.

 This conference offers a forum for examining women’s religious lives in this period from a range of historical and literary perspectives e.g. spiritual and polemical writings by “exceptional” women, but also the reading habits, devotional routines, domestic piety and social networks, which characterised the religious culture of less visible women. It also aims to reassess both women’s contributions to processes of renewal, change, and reform, and their role in a popular conservative reaction to Restoration morality and the Enlightenment.

 For more information see: <http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/research/clusters/early_modern_britain_/women/>

Ecclesiastical History Society, Summer Conference, University of Durham, 22-25 July 2009

The theme of the conference is “Saints and Sanctity”. The convenors point out that Holy Men and Women are a feature of most religions but that the contours of the Christian notion of Sainthood have been historically determined in a particular way and the very idea of Saints has been the subject of controversy.

 It is pointed out that the Christian notion of sainthood began with the veneration of the martyrs, both as those who witnessed to their faith in an exemplary way and those who are now in the immediate presence of God and thus able to act as intercessors for Christians still on earth. It gradually spread to include confessors and quickly spread to include ascetics and bishops. Sainthood was associated with power. It is also pointed out that in the West bishops very quickly established control over the cult of saints, limiting it to the dead and usually men, approved by the bishops, in contrast to the East, where living holy men retained genuine power.

 Revisiting of this theme is invited as well as the cult of saints focusing on relics and images (icons) and involving pilgrimages; comparison of qualifications for sainthood compared with Shamanism; the critiquing of the cult of saints by the Protestant Reformers; the decline of saint-making in the Catholic Church in 17-19th centuries; the relationship of the phenomenon of saints and saint making in Protestantism and popular devotion; analysis of 17th century English publications such as Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress which engage with the issue of sanctity as have publications and cults emerging from the 19th and early 20th century Catholic and Protestant missionary activities and the challenges of the world wars and cold war as well as the upsurge in pilgrimages . For more information see http//ehs.bangor.ac.uk

21st International Congress of Historical Sciences (ICHS), 22-28 August Amsterdam, 2010

This congress takes place every five years and provides an ideal venue for extensive reports, papers, debates, exchanges, and meetings reflecting historical research in action. It is billed as “**the** meeting place for the global community of historians”. For detailed information re the great variety of areas covered see [www.ichs2010.org](http://www.ichs2010.org/)

International Federation for Research in Women’s History Conference, in association with ICHS, Amsterdam, 22-28 August 1010

The theme of this conference is “Unequal Sisters: Women, Gender, and Global Inequalities in Historical Perspective.” The aim of this theme is to focus on and further explore women’s history from a global and non-Western perspective. The convenors are looking for papers which deal with a variety of material and nonmaterial inequalities and hierarchies such as those related to class, gender, race, caste, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, education, age, or health, which have affected women’s lives in and across all parts of the world and in different historical periods.

 They also hope to explore the ways in which women have challenged or fought these inequalities and hierarchies through different kinds of politics and activism, as well as individual actions and forms of resistance in the so-called “private sphere”

For more information see: <http://www.ifrwh.com>

Book Review

**Carmen Mangion, *Contested identities: Catholic women religious in nineteenth-century England and Wales* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008). Pp. xiii +281.**

This book, based on doctoral research, is a significant addition to the growing body of recently published scholarly historical studies of women religious, the nature of their life-style and aims and their contribution as a distinctive social grouping in their contemporary society. These studies, of which this book is a fine example, exhibit detailed and meticulous research, sound background knowledge of historical and social contexts and an absence of skewing polemic.

Carmen Mangion has drawn on the methodology of the recently popularised approach of prosopography, the researching, in terms of multiple criteria, of the history of groups as elements in political and social history. It has been defined as the history of social groupings and events ‘combined with the hidden social history of long-term evolutionary processes’. Above all, it seeks to explore the *identity*, in its fullest context, of such groupings.

Mangion has taken for detailed analysis ten congregations of Catholic female religious who either arrived in England or were founded there in the course of the 19th century, these dates of appearance ranging from 1830 to 1884. Four of these were founded in France, three in England and one each in Ireland, Belgium and India. Three were founded in the 17th century and the remainder in the 19th. Their primary involvements were in education, social work and health care. All became firmly established, attracting many additional women to their ranks before the close of the century. Successive chapters explore themes such as ‘Becoming visible’, ‘Choosing religious life’, ‘Forming a novice’, ‘Professionalising’ and finally ‘Corporate identities’, with exploration of class and ethnicity and of authority and governance. Detailed use is made of convent archives as rich sources, together with relevant outside data, for analysing these issues.

This book merits careful reading by those engaged in similar studies. It raises further important situating issues, such as the emergence into public involvement and visibility, especially in the 19th century, of the simple-vow congregations hitherto regarded as quasi-religious lacking the legal, social and canonical recognition of those solemnly vowed in the category of regulars. Their historical background lay in medieval quasi-religious groupings such as those of the beguines, beatas and mantellate. In their evolution, especially from the 16th century, such groups obtained corporate recognition from local bishops, hence their later description as ‘of diocesan right’ when they gained canonical recognition in the 19th century, with the bishop or another designated by him as an ‘ecclesiastical superior’ until this function was canonically deleted in favour of the congregation’s self-governance.

There is also the issue of spiritual experience, a reality not easily handled by the tools of accepted research methodologies. However, to neglect or be unaware of this dimension of human experience and its influence in specific motivations and decisions is to offer an inadequate analysis of purportedly religious movements.

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