

**Golding Centre for Women’s History Theology and Spirituality**

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Newsletter

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**Editorial**

**The Catholic Women’s League and Myth Making!**

We are celebrating this year the Sydney Diocesan Catholic Women’s League (CWL) centenary of service to the Church and the wider community. Like the Country Women’s Association and countless other women’s organisations in Australia, while being readily called upon to render assistance in times of need, the CWL can too often be dismissed as essentially a “tea and scones” association, though it is readily admitted that the latter are of a high quality! Specifically, it is never seriously considered that the lived wisdom of these women be formally represented on the top policy making committees of the Sydney Diocese.

As “the tea and scones” myth concerning women’s organisations has evolved across the decades in Australia it has drawn upon the wider patronising attitude to the domestic realm of life, which is well documented across the centuries and appears to be in all cultures. To address such destructive attitudes to domesticity it is necessary to critique the symbol of the “cup of tea”. As more women generally have had greater opportunities of education and some have become significant members of businesses and organisations there has been a strong tendency for them and their supporters to protest against such women being regarded as the ”tea ladies” of the Board. Such protestors are inadvertently promoting misogynist values. It is suggested that the more life-giving approach is to invite each member of the board, especially the chairperson, to have the privilege of serving tea to the group.

There is obviously a need for the domestic symbol of the “cup of tea” to be rescued from being an expression of derision and recognised more truthfully as a valid expression of the “cup of water” which Christ extolled when given in love. In 1905 when Annie Golding surveyed the history of relations between men and women across the centuries she observed:

In all lands property, military glory, and lust for power were the highest ideals. The humanising influences – sentiment, family, love and other domestic virtues - were relegated to an inferior place.

The fruit of this is being seen at present as we observe the progress of the war in Afghanistan and the high degree of post-traumatic distress disorder that is reported as being increasingly evident among returning soldiers. It is surely time for the basic value of the humanising “cup of tea” to be highlighted!

Another myth connected with the Catholic Women’s League that needs to be addressed is that the highly political Annie and Belle Golding and their married sister Kate Dwyer, though they attended the inaugural meeting of the CWL, dissociated themselves from it as its original explicit non-political nature did not align with their reforming agenda. It is recorded concerning the early history of the CWL (originally the Catholic Women’s Association) that at the inaugural meeting Annie Golding was elected as one of the vice-presidents of the provisional committee which was formed but subsequently she and her sisters resigned. This is based upon the following comment provided by “Eblana” the Women’s News reporter for the *Catholic Press*:

They have always been such excellent workers and advocates of the cause and their experience in such a movement would have been invaluable, but like others, when they have joined, they were misled regarding certain important items, so they resigned.

This was accepted as the truth of the situation well into the 21st century until Janice Garaty, a Golding Centre doctoral student and now graduate, had occasion to be reading through a selection of the CWL publication, *Legion Review*, when it became clear that the Golding women had not resigned their membership of CWL. Annie, no doubt, had resigned as a vice-president, probably because she preferred to put her leadership talents into more directly politically engaged committees. But it was obvious that she and her sisters remained members of the CWL. It would seem that, as is often the case, a newspaper reporter, who did not check her sources closely and follow up the story, provided a half- truth which formed the basis of a myth.

It is possible to analyse the history of the CWL through the lens of relationship with men, especially clerical men. From her amazingly wide ranging knowledge of the history of women across the centuries, Annie Golding was aware that the welfare of both women and men in society progresses when they intelligently and lovingly support one another. She was opposed to placing women on a pedestal of superior virtue. It was equal respect across the sexes which she advocated. Translating this into real-life situations, as the women of the CWL have for 100 years, is often a mine-field of diplomacy ! For them it has been made possible by the common Christian ideals they shared with the men, common sense, and a sympathy for human frailty !

*The Catholic Weekly’s* special wrap around cover celebrating the CWL centenary is to be strongly commended, In this Cardinal Pell warmly congratulated the women and expressed appreciation of their work saying among other things: “I’ve encountered some magnificent women who have made a profound contribution, some of them internationally”. The Cardinal has a strong historical background but, alas, along with men historians generally, he displayed a crucial lack of knowledge of women’s history in his comment concerning the addressing of women’s issues by the CWL: “The Catholic Women’s League has probably been, historically, the first group to answer that call and to meet that challenge!” As historians of women’s history know, the predecessors of the CWL are legion across the ages and in our own Australia and specifically in Sydney!

This highlights the inadequacy of mainstream history, which is continually being drawn upon to inform social and political policies as well as theologies and spiritualities! Nevertheless, sincere, loving Centenary Congratulations to the Sydney Catholic Women’s League! **With enthusiasm** **we raise our tea cups to toast you!**

**Feature Essay**

**Augustine and Supervision of a PhD student (Female)**

**Experiences and Insights**

[In this essay Dr Joseph Lam, German Augustinian academic, shares with us his experience of supervising a Lutheran woman student in her researching and writing of a thesis on Augustine and feminist theology.]

**Introduction**

Currently I am reading the works of the well-known female philosopher Edith Stein. This is part of my continuing supervision of a PhD project. Stein’s philosophical fame is associated with her PhD thesis on “Empathy” (*Einfühlung* in German)[[1]](#footnote-1) which she undertook under the supervision of the then celebrated German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Stein completed her PhD in 1916 with “summa cum laude”. Given the fact that German society and culture at that time discouraged females to pursue higher education,[[2]](#footnote-2) this achievement is remarkable. Naturally, Stein’s relationship to her supervisor was not an easy one. As a strong woman with a clear mind and purpose, she occasionally lamented the stubbornness and arrogance of her professor.[[3]](#footnote-3) Both, nevertheless, managed to cooperate because of their general acceptance of the cultural paradigms of that time. In the third Millennium these given cultural paradigms are no longer generally accepted. The present pluralistic society requires a new approach to supervision, in particular with regard to the supervision of female students.

**Supervision of Female Students in the Third Millenium**

In order to comprehend these challenges, please allow me to draw upon my own experience with a female higher education student. My case is special in that I am not only an academic but also a Catholic celibate religious priest. As a monk in the Augustinian tradition it is natural that I focus my studies on Augustine, who has been often accused of being a theological misogynist.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The editor of this newsletter reminded me that the accusation of misogyny against Augustine is not without good grounds. In their 1975 collection of documents entitled *Not in God’s Image – Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians,* editors Julia 0’Faolain and Lauro Martines, in reference to the ongoing scholarly discussion of St Paul’s Galations, 3:28, implying the equality of men and women, quoted Augustine’s comment on this text, which included the following:

The woman together with her own husband is the image of God , so that the whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred to separately in her quality of helpmate, which regards herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him. [130]

My special expertise and research interest focused on the theology of the Fathers of the Church. I was accustomed to write exclusively from a male perspective. This style was cemented by the fact that I taught for several years in Rome and my students were seminarians or priests.

However, among my students subsequently was a (happily) married evangelical Protestant woman who asked me to supervise her on the topic of Augustine and feminist theology! Such a project requires much more than academic skills. I was, as you can imagine, hesitant in my decision to accept the responsibility of the supervision of this thesis. . On the one hand, I was academically very interested. But on the other hand, I was fearful because of her denominational and theo-political upbringing.

At the end of the day, my academic curiosity persuaded me to accept her as a doctoral student. As I was trained in traditional theology originating from the Fathers of the Church, I insisted that she study the traditions and philosophical backgrounds of the time of Augustine. However, she, like Edith Stein, was not willing to give up her psychological interest in her chosen topic. According to her view, a psychological analysis of the writings of Augustine would additionally reveal this Doctor of the Church’s view of and attitude towards woman. She argued that one must not restrict oneself to the philosophical and cultural background involved since all interpretations would come down finally to the degree to which one can empathise with a figure of the past; a psychological approach would be much better than a pure systematic view. Her persistence triumphed!

This was the first lesson I had to learn as a supervisor of a female doctoral student. They can bring new ideas into the common traditional approaches to theological research. It is their specific gift to do things differently. By doing so, they also help emancipate male academics to be more inclusive in their approach to theological questions. Furthermore, my student’s approach at the same time highlighted my ideological blindness. As I am an Augustinian monk I naturally would not want Augustine to be exposed as a misogynist, in spite of the objective facts! There are already many who consider Augustine a “womanizer” and likewise I did not want to supervise a thesis which could possibly lead to the same accusation.

There was also another problem which I need to mention. During the time of working on her thesis this student became pregnant. While being a very well organised person, her pregnancy started to affect her academic performance. She could not produce as much completed work I expected of her. How would I appreciate her situation as I am a celibate priest? I was at a loss with how to cope with the situation; I had no previous experience on which I could rely. Of course I baptise children but then I just head off home!

This experience also taught me a new lesson: through her experience of pregnancy she gained insights into the love Monica, the mother of Augustine, reserved unconditionally for her son. Monica is often seen as an ambitious and controlling mother. However, my student’s pregnancy helped her and me to see the deeper level of Monica’s love and “angst”. It is here that I also came to value the female dimension of God’s care. In the Bible God is also compared with a mother in labour (*Is*. 42:14), or with a mother who suckles Israel her children (*Num* 11:12). Further, God as Mother can never forgets the child she nurses (*Is* 49:14-15). Of course, I knew all these female characteristics of God; but I tended to ignore them rather than to really appreciate them. The supervision of this female student opened my eyes more fully to their reality. Also my view of Augustine’s mother, whom the Bishop of Hippo himself saw as a representation of the Church, was enlarged. In his mother Augustine appreciated the feminine quality of the Church. It was her assiduous prayers and her unconditional love that brought Augustine back to faith. Augustine’s greatness is partially indebted to his mother. Perhaps we should take this as an encouragement for pursuing today’s debate on the role of women in the Church.

**In conclusion**

Significant aspects of Edith Stein’s insight into empathy were played out in my experience of supervising this female doctoral student. What Edith Stein was for Edmund Husserl, so was my student for me, in spite of the inappropriateness of this comparison. Stein is a Saint and she rightly deserves this title. Husserl is one of the greatest philosophers of our time. However, it is through my student’s approach that I learnt to value the empathic dimension of research. Theology is not only an abstract enterprise, it is also embedded in human life experience. The word of God (*Logos tou theou*) is not only alive in the theological manuscripts, it is alive in the experiences of human persons which makes them a living book. Theological research therefore should be based on two pillars: a) systematic thoroughness; b) empathy with the life and circumstances of the person conducting the theological research. In this way theology (faith) is truly incarnated in the person’s life.

Today it is normal practice that female and male academics direct students of the opposite sex. However, I think we still do not fully realise the complexity and potential richness of the situation.

**Dr Jospeh Lam OSA, School of Theology, Australian Catholic University.**

**Of Interest**

Although, few of us Australians will be in a position to attend the following advertised workshop, it is to be commended as an effort to remind us of the scholarship of the women who have gone before us .

A one-day workshop will be held on 26 September at Chawton House Library to celebrate women writing history during the long eighteenth century. Especially commemorated will be the 250th anniversary of the publication of Catharine Macauley’s *History of England* . The first volume of her history was published in 1763. Catharine Macauley is reputed to be the first scholar to use footnotes in her work.

Mary Wollstonecraft lamented later in the century that the death of this great woman was scarcely mentioned in the press.

Venue: Chawton, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 1SJ For more information: Wendy Robins: [wendyr@sussex.ac.ak](mailto:wendyr@sussex.ac.ak) or Stephen Bygrave: s.j. [bygrave@soton.ac.uk](mailto:bygrave@soton.ac.uk) Facebook & twitter @ChawtonHouse

**Letter from London**

Over the years, Historians of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland (H-WRBI) conference attendees and those who couldn’t attend the conferences have asked us when we were going to publish conference proceedings. We have now arrived at the point where willing editors, interested publishers and strong thematic links have coalesced to produce several volumes that are a welcome addition to the historiography of women religious of Britain and Ireland.

Among these are five papers from the 2010 H-WRBI conference organised by KADOC, the Belgian research centre of Religion, Culture and Society, on the theme of ‘Female Religious in the British Isles: Interactions with the Continent’, which have been included in the journal *Trajecta* published by the University of Leuven.

Of these, for the early modern period, Liesbeth Corens engages with the role of convents and English expatriates while Pascal Majérus discusses exiled nuns and their use of languages. In relation to the nineteenth century, we have Raphaël Ingelbien’s essay on feminism, liberalism and nationalism as found in Lady Morgan’s representations of women religious in *The  Princess or the Béguine*  (1835). For those interested in the twentieth century, we have Dirk Van Overmeire’s essay on mission geographer Margaret Thornton (1898-1977) of the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Belgian scholar, Pierre Charles SJ (1883-1954) along with Antoine Jacobs’ examination of the challenges of the Dutch Carmelites in developing a foundation in Blackburn, Lancashire in the last half of the nineteenth century.

KADOC has organised numerous workshops and conferences over the years concerned with the history of religious life in Europe. Their 2008 workshop on religious institutes and finances has resulted in the publication this year of *The Economics of Providence: Management, Finances and Patrimony of Religious Orders and Congregations in Europe, 1773-c1930* edited by Maarten Van Dijck, Jan de Maeyer, Jeffrey Tyssens and Jimmy Koppen. This book contains fourteen essays, some in English and others in French, focused on Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France and, of course, Ireland and England. In this volume, Maria Luddy explores the funding of Irish convents in the nineteenth century; Carmen M. Mangion examines how Providence Free Hospital, managed by the Poor Servants on the Mother of God, became integrated into civil society in St Helens, Lancashire; Joy Frith takes a look at the Community of All Hallows, an Anglican sisterhood, and their participation in the economies of moral reform.

The annual 2011 H-WRBI conference was organised along with the ‘Who Were the Nuns’ project conference and Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly have edited selected papers from the conference which will be published later this year as *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture and Identity*. This volume examines the development of an English Catholic identity moulded by the experience of exile. This essay collection is interdisciplinary in nature and includes essays on spirituality and politicisation, writing, musical culture, visual culture, Irish nuns in English convents and the history of emotions.

Deirdre Raftery and Elizabeth Smyth will be editing a selection of the papers from the 2012 H-WRBI conference ‘Vocation, Education and Care’ held in Dublin which will be published in 2014. Themes ranged from Mary Ward’s legacy to education , identity building, missions and archives.

And let us not forget the recently published six volumes of primary documents published in *English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800* which was part of the ‘Who Were the Nuns?’ project (<http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/index.html>). Most of these documents are rare and previously unpublished manuscripts from the archives of convents that had been operating in exile. Each volume explores a theme: history, spirituality, life writing, management and the outside world. These volumes will form the basis of future scholarly work on the history of women religious. Volume editors include Laurence Lux-Sterritt, Nicky Hallett, Katrien Daemen-de Gelder, James E. Kelly and Carmen M. Mangion.

The history of women religious in Britain and Ireland remains under-researched though this letter shows strong evidence that this is changing. It is far less integrated into ‘mainstream’ history, or even ‘women’s’ history, than it should be. H-WRBI exists to support scholars of women religious and their research. This letter, along with the book reviews published on the H-WRBI list serve and website, publicises this work so that more scholars become aware of the relevance of the history of women religious to not only religious and Catholic history, but to political, social and cultural history.

Unfortunately, most academic books are expensive, but these volumes can be suggested for purchase by university libraries. Individuals may volunteer to write a book review of one or more of the books for an academic journal or the Catholic press and get the book for free! Referencing these volumes in your own research or adding these texts to course syllabi points to the transnational nature of Catholic religious life and research. It’s important that scholars, publishers and students are aware of the relevance of the history of women religious to public life.

And now, I will get off my soapbox with a final reminder: this year’s conference organised by Kate Jordan and Ayla Lepine will be held at the Institute of Historical Research, London, England on 5-7 September 2013 on the theme of ‘Materializing the Spirit: Space, Objects and Art in the Cultures of Women Religious’. The programme will be out shortly: <http://www.history.ac.uk/history-women-religious/article/cfp-h-wrbi-annual-conference>.

Information on the books can be found:

*Trajecta*: [sabine.vanreybroeck@kadoc.kuleuven.be](mailto:sabine.vanreybroeck@kadoc.kuleuven.be)

*The Economics of Providence: Management, Finances and Patrimony of Religious Orders and Congregations in Europe 1773-1931*: <http://upers.kuleuven.be/en/orderinginformation>

*The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture and Identity,* <http://www.ashgatepublishing.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&title_id=12059&edition_id=12438>

*English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*, <http://www.pickeringchatto.com/titles/1017-english-convents-in-exile>

**Dr Carmen Mangion**

**Birkbeck College, University of London.**

Book Review

**Mary C. Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012). Pp. xx + 419.**

Mary Sullivan, a United States Sister of Mercy, has been researching the life and legacy of Mercy foundress, Catherine McAuley, for a number of years, with publications, notably the 2004 *Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841)*, dating from 1990. This latest book is the most detailed and contextually explored life of this remarkable woman to date and would seem unable to be rivalled. Among the hundreds of religious institutes founded in the 19th century by deeply committed women, motivated by their Christian faith, for the relief of the many social ills crying out for redress in that century’s rapidly developing expansionist milieu – both internal and external for European societies – her religious institute was to become the most extensive in the English-speaking world.

Catherine, as this detailed study reveals, was a very contemporary 19th century woman, when many women, in Ireland as elsewhere, were expending themselves with initiative and expertise in the cause of social relief and the empowerment of the less advantaged. She also lived at a time of significant evolution of the Catholic Church’s parallel canonical endorsement of such activity. Hitherto, those women, canonically and legally (in civil law) recognised from medieval times as solemnly professed religious, were bound from ancient monastic precedent to enclosure. However, down the centuries, many groups of women, religiously dedicated to celibate lives and communal relief of need, existed with the corporate approbation of local bishops. If they bound themselves by vows, these were private (of no legal effect) and described as simple. Many received papal endorsement for their commitment and good works.

However, in the changing European climate of the later 18th century, these began to receive more formal papal endorsement, leading to the first full canonical incorporation of a group of Charity Sisters in Ghent in 1816. Others rapidly sought such approbation and an ‘avalanche’ of new ones were founded. Catherine’s fledgling institute of Sisters of Mercy – stemming from her building of her ‘House of Mercy’ which, with the collaboration of interested young women, was taking shape as a multi-pronged charity from 1827 – received approval from Archbishop Murray of Dublin in 1831; they then moved, with his encouragement, to apply for Roman approbation, gained in 1841, the year of Catherine’s death.

So much for broad historical outlines – the richness of this mile-stone study lies in its portrayal of Catherine in the daily circumstances of her life and her courageously and clear-sightedly undertaken endeavours in the fields of social relief and basic education. This was in an Ireland with an emerging (or re-emerging) Catholic middle class and a poverty-bound underclass where a totally dependent tenantry sought to subsist on small rural plots at an increasingly dangerous level of subdivision. Catherine, like her broadly contemporary other Irish religious founders (including Edmund Rice), came from a financially and socially well placed background, which initially enabled their developing projects. Crying needs led them to expend wealth and effort which soon reached far beyond their small European island to the destinations where so many Irish had, largely through necessity, emigrated.

By the time of Catherine’s death, her Sisters in their canonically independent communities ( a structure she favoured and which enabled rapid spread and adaptability) were established in many parts of Ireland, in England and North America, all closely bound - through Catherine’s precedent of warm personal letters among equals, as she saw it – in a common bond of Mercy and the support it conveyed. Before long, they would be in Australia (1846), Argentina (1856) and serving as nurses in the Crimean War. The Mercy Sisters around the world were to be found, from their first foundations, in education, initially free schools for the poor, but soon in every level of schooling, including teacher training, while serving in social and health care, hospitals and orphanages. They continued to be inspired by their foundress, whose personal spirituality, expressed in letters and other writing, warmth, candour and sincerity of character, with avoidance of any recognition for herself in her concern for others, are tellingly and extensively revealed in this comprehensive biography.

**It is of interest to our Newsletter readers that two young women closely associated with Catherine’s final days, and whom she deeply influenced, became foundresses in Australia: Ursula Frayne (Perth and Melbourne) and Vincent Whitty (Brisbane). Rosa MacGinley, ACU, Brisbane**

**Conferences**

**Australian Women’s History Network Symposium. 2013** will be held at the University of Wollongong Wednesday 20 July in association with the Australian Historical Association Conference. Its theme is **Women in Motion**. The Keynote address with be given by Francisca de Haan,

Professor of Gender Studies and History at the Central European University, Budapest, Hungary and affiliated with the women’s archives in Amsterdam. The main focus of her research since the 1980s has been the history of women’s work and women’s movements, nationally and transnationally.

**For more information: www. Theaha.org.au/mobilities; Vera Mackie:** [**vera@uow.edu.au**](mailto:vera@uow.edu.au)

**Ninth Triennial Conference of the History of Women Religious, June 23-26 2013.**

**T**he theme for this conference is ”Women Religious Through the Ages: Managing Individual and Institutional Realities”. The venue is St Catherine’s University. St Paul, Minnesota. It is wide ranging and involves scholars from non-denominationally based universities both in USA and beyond, including Australia. For more information: <http://cushwa.nd.edu/assets/96634/>

**[This Newsletter is produced by the Golding Centre for Women’s History ,Theology and Spirituality. Please address all correspondence to the editor, Dr Sophie McGrath rsm. Email: sophie.mcgrath@ acu.edu.au ]**

1. E. Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung in seiner historischen Entwicklung and in phänomenlogischer Betrachtung*, (Halle, 1917). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. P. Petschauer, ‘Improving Educational Opportunities for Girls in Eighteenth Century Germany’, in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 3 (1976), 56-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Husserl and Stein*, edited by Richard Feist and William Sweet, (Washington, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Misogeny in Western Tradition: A Reader*, edited by Beverley Clack, (New York: Routledge, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)