

Newsletter

(The Golding Centre is situated within the Faculty of Theology of the Australian Catholic University and is named to honour 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.)

Editorial

There have always been men who have been feminists, understanding this term to mean those who truly respect women, acknowledging and promoting their particular gifts and rights for the benefit of all.

In the early centuries of Christian history the famous, though somewhat eccentric, biblical scholar, Jerome, believed in the ability of women and their right to an education. Among other things, he nurtured the talent of Marcella, a Roman matron, who became a biblical authority in Rome. John Chrysostom had close women friends such as Olympias who founded monasteries. Gregory of Nyssa and his brother Basil were supportive of their sister Macrina. Gregory of Nazianzen showed a sensitive appreciation of marriage and the position of women before the law.

In the Middle Ages the Albergensian heretics promoted women in ministry and this prompted Dominic to provide for the education of these women and establish the first Dominican Convent for women. Such well known medieval mystics as Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Siena were supported by men disciples. Pope Innocent II defended the rights of women to live the life of Cistercian nuns and insisted on the men Cistercians, who were resisting this move, to support them. The father of the famous medieval writer Christine de Pisan educated her so that on his death and that of her husband she was able to earn her living by writing and support her mother and children as well as resist the efforts of various men to undermine her integrity. (Christine was a contemporary of St Joan of Arc!)

The famous English martyr Thomas More in the 16th century developed the talents of his daughter, Meg. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Archbishop Francois Fenelon of Cambrai promoted the education of women, holding that an uneducated woman could do more damage than an uneducated man. And so it has gone on into the twenty-first century, but this tradition has been a minor one and like the history of women has been considered of little importance and not highlighted. Also it needs to be noted that the men in this tradition were not always consistent and, as ever, the frailties of human nature and strong anti-feminist mores of a particular society prevailed.

This positive tradition in men's history, however, emerges again in all its complexity in Peter Bastian's monograph *Andrew Fisher: an underestimated man*, published in May this year by New South Wales University Press. Peter, who teaches history at ACU, belongs to the positive male tradition cited above and readily accepted the invitation to introduce us to the Margaret, the wife of Andrew Fisher, as she emerged in the course of his research. We had become aware of her as a supporter of womanhood suffrage from a photo in Audrey Oldfield's book *Woman Suffrage in Australia* where she is in a group with Vida Goldstein (Victoria) preparing to join the British women in their famous 1911 suffrage march.

Report on the Conference of the European Society for Catholic Theology

This conference was held in Limerick from 20-23 August 2009 at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. The theme chosen for the gathering was “Eager Longing of Creation: Interdisciplinary Theological Perspectives on Ecology and Economy”. The richness of the content of five plenary papers, the optional parallel papers, prayerful celebrations and the interaction among almost 200 participants/theologians cannot be described in a short article. Thankfully, the proceedings of the congress are available for purchase on CD-ROM while participants received copies (In English, French and German) of the plenary sessions via a USB. Australian participants were three women religious: Maryanne Confoy, Elaine Wainwright and Pauline (Francine) Shaw.

The audience swelled noticeably when plenary papers were being presented. The most remarkable of these were those by Professor Sean Freyne of Trinity College, Dublin, on “Genesis and Apocalypse: Reflections on Ecology”, and Professor Lieven Boeve, KU Leuven & ESCT President who reviewed the past 20 years of ESCT examining “Theology at the Crossroads of Academy, Church and Society”.

Sr Maryanne Confoy’s presentation in a parallel session drew high praise from her audience for her paper entitled “Consider it, take Counsel, and Speak Out: Responding to the Eager Longing of Creation for Unity.” She argued that the appalling image of violation and the splitting up of the concubine in Judges 19:30 is applicable to the desecration of both ecological and economic relationships in the present era. I found her reference to Evelyn Underhill’s understanding of contemplative awareness along with Merton’s complementary work most enlightening. Maryanne called for an integrative approach to the teaching of philosophy and theology, which, she said, needs to be done in dialogue with the human sciences. This should be done in such a way that it attends to Reality, transcends division, and speaks out on behalf of the unity of creation.

As a Franciscan, I was drawn to listen to Cathal Duddy’s paper, “From Steward to Family Member: A Franciscan Approach to Environmental Theology”. He spoke of the unhealthy split in the thinking between human beings and nature where human needs are always in priority. St Francis related to creation as members of one big family whose Source and Father is God and in which human beings have a special place because we see God’s handiwork in everything and everything reflects some of the goodness and love of God. There is much to be gained both in Bonaventurian works and those of John Duns Scotis concerning a vision of a community of all life with Christ at its centre. The Franciscan approach offers an alternative wholly Christian model to the Church where all creatures are valued without compromising the sanctity of human life.

The highpoint of the conference was the celebration of the Eucharist in Limerick’s St John’s Cathedral. The main celebrant was Cardinal Sean Brady and after Mass he waited at the cathedral entrance to speak personally with participants of the conference. When asked if he would join in a photo for Australia, he willingly obliged, recounting his pleasant visit last year to World Youth Day celebrations.

Pauline (Francine) Shaw *fmic*
(Golding Centre postdoctoral research member)

ACHS Conference: Catholics in Australian Public Life

The Australian Catholic Historical Society Association conference was held at the Catholic Institute of Sydney on 12 September 2009. It was well organized and brought together a large group of Australian historians with a special interest in the

history Catholics in general and the Catholic Church in Australia in particular. On the whole there was strong evidence of in-depth, contextualized research in progress if not completed. The drawback of restrictive choice of papers resulted from confining the conference to one day, which meant that there were three lots of three parallel sessions with each session consisting of three 20 minute papers with very little scope for discussion. Such an arrangement, however, had the advantage of permitting inter-state people coming for the day and making participants aware of the range of research currently in progress in Australia.

The Conference was opened by Rev Dr Gerard Kelly, the Principal of CIS, who pointed out that it needed to be noted that theologians depended upon history and he was personally grateful for the hard work of historians. Edmund Campion, in his keynote address in his usual generous, life-giving style, reminded us that we were “all children of Patrick O’Farrell” and went on to celebrate the numerous publications that had followed O’Farrell, building upon his work, critiquing it, where necessary correcting it, and opening up new fields of research.

The papers in the parallel sessions ranged widely. Some featured Church men like Father Daniel Power, the official Roman Catholic Chaplain from 1827 until 1830, who has been overshadowed by Father Therry; Cardinal Moran as he emerges from women’s history; Cardinal Freeman as Catholic priest and Australian; and Monsignor J.F.McCosker in relation to social policy.

Missionary activity in Australia was highlighted by papers on German missionaries in Queensland and the relationship between the Sydney Archdiocese and the establishment of the Catholic Mission on Palm Island, North Queensland;

High-profile lay Catholics were given significant attention in papers such as those focusing on the four Judges - Therry, Faucett, Madden and Real; the politician Caldwell in relation to multiculturalism; Henry Clement Hoyle NSW MLA; and trade unionist Hugh Mahon – political activist from Ireland, Australian politician and influential lay Catholic in Victoria; the charismatic William Bede Dalley politician and first Australian appointed to the Privy Council; High Taylor of Parramatta, 19th century politician and poor man’s friend; Charles O’Neill, engineer, NZ parliamentarian and founder of St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW;

Also given attention were the complexities of lay Catholic life such as that in the 19th century especially concerning Church regulations regarding marriage and education of children in Catholic schools; social justice and the liturgical movement in Australia featuring the South Australian layman Paul McGuire; and the history of Catholics in the Liberal Party. Not particularly successful but interesting and entertaining people also received attention as in the person of Christopher Covney, “frustrated colonial artist”.

The final panel session on Meddlesome Catholics featured Michael Costigan who highlighted prominent players in the *Catholic Press* in Melbourne from the 1940s to the latter part of the 20th century; and Clara Geoghegan who spoke with much insight on the life and times of Caroline Chisholm.

Andrew and Margaret Fisher: Marriage, Households and the Rights of Women

On 31 December 1901, Andrew Fisher, the member for Wide Bay in the new Commonwealth Parliament, married Margaret Irvine at her family home in Red Hill, Gympie. The groom was aged thirty- nine and his bride was twenty seven and their ages suggested that perhaps this was a marriage of convenience. However, while they were not outwardly demonstrative (they never later held hands, embraced or kissed in front of their children), the Fishers would have a solid and enduring marriage.¹ Although born in Australia, Margaret inherited enough sense of Scottish customs from her immigrant parents to fit comfortably into a marriage with Andrew who had arrived in Queensland from Ayrshire in 1885. A tall brunette – she was the same height as her new husband – Margaret also shared many of Andrew’s values. The couple had taught Sunday school together at the Gympie Presbyterian Church, were firm believers in the cause of Labour and were strong supporters of the rights of women. They would embark upon an interesting marriage and household within the parameters of Andrew’s very successful political career. He was to serve as Australian prime minister on three occasions before becoming High Commissioner in London during the Great War.²

Andrew had known his wife since she was a teenager because some time in late 1890 or early 1891, he began to board with her family. Henry Irvine, a local mine manager, had suffocated in a mining accident and his wife, Margaret, faced with the loss of income, decided to establish a boarding house in Crown Road, Red Hill, and let out her nearby Maori Lane home.³ Possibly some of Andrew’s support for women’s rights was directly influenced by the hard working Irvines as much as by the broad labour reform movement. Margaret Irvine eventually owned the two Gympie homes before she later left to live in Melbourne and she instilled in her daughter a strong sense of hard work and financial independence. When Andrew was first elected to the Queensland parliament in 1893, he spoke regularly on the need for a society to be as open and democratic as possible. In order to achieve this he advocated creating equal electorates and introducing universal suffrage for men as well as woman.⁴ These were views he would strongly advocate over the next two decades.

At first glance, the Fishers were to have a fairly conventional marriage especially after they came to live in Melbourne from 1903 onwards. By 1907 they acquired land in Dinsdale Street, Albert Park, to build their first home. Margaret actually purchased the block and the six-room house, with a good size lounge room, was ready for occupancy by December of that year. This decision was perhaps precipitated by the fact that in 1906 Margaret Irvine left her Gympie homes in the care of her sisters and, along with her three other daughters, came to live with the Fishers. The mortgage on the Albert Park property was in Margaret Fisher’s name and by 1909, all debt had been discharged. The ability to quickly pay off this relatively large sum may have been partly due to some contribution from Margaret Irvine as part of her new living arrangements with the Fishers.⁵ The decision to live in Melbourne meant that the Fishers escaped from the expectations of a certain social position often consigned to people in a country town. Over time, they found it possible to transform their social status within a larger and more fluid urban environment. In 1912 they purchased a substantial home, Oakleigh Hall, in East St Kilda. Despite its being in a somewhat run down condition,

¹ On the Fisher wedding, see *Gympie Times*, 2 January 1902.

² On Fisher’s career see my recent book, *Andre Fisher: an underestimated man*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2009.

³ On Henry Irvine’s death see the memoirs of Peggy Fisher, National Library of Australia, 1, 37.

⁴ Queensland Parliamentary Debates, 11th Parliament, 1st Session, 22, 26 May 1893; aside from Fisher’s support of democratic principles cited in May 1893, see comments on voting in *ibid.*, 1021, 6 October, 1893 and 2nd session, 36-41, 18 July 1894.

⁵ Bastian, *Andrew Fisher*, 128.

Oakleigh Hall it was still a magnificent structure and moved the family even further up the Melbourne social ladder.

The Fishers also produced quite a large family of five boys and one daughter (another daughter was stillborn in 1916). They maintained, by Australian standards of the time, a large household but never employed outside servants since they had their female relatives to assist them. For several years there were six adults in the house, and, by 1912, six children as well. Although Margaret's sister Christine married in 1913, Elsie and Annie still lived with the Fishers until their weddings during 1915. Andrew almost certainly saw himself as the centre of this household with its women and children serving him to some extent. Margaret Irvine (or Gran) would always bring him a cup of tea whenever he was working at home and Elsie, who never had a job outside of the home, spoilt him by bringing his breakfast in bed every morning. His wife concentrated upon running the household smoothly so that her husband was free to focus upon his public duties. It is hardly surprising that many observers thought of Andrew's domestic life as being 'pleasant and unpretentious' or that he could become unsettled when travelling if Margaret or her mother were not there to look after him.⁶ Margaret Fisher appears to have been content with this largely traditional role even though she happily accompanied her husband to official functions and Fisher's colleagues found they were always welcome at her home. Of course, her largely shunning the public limelight was not unusual in this period as none of the early Australian prime minister's wives assumed any real public roles nor was it expected of them.

However in other ways, Margaret Fisher was quite an independent woman. She held the mortgage on the Albert Park residence and the couple kept a joint bank account, something relatively uncommon in those days. She was not given a housekeeping allowance by her husband but managed her own budget and drew out money when needed.⁷ Politically she closely read the daily newspapers and often kept sections to point out to her husband in the evenings if something caught her eye. Because she had so much female support in the household it was also possible for her to often travel with her husband on his political campaigns around the country or overseas. In 1911 she accompanied him to London for the coronation of George V. The Fishers only took Robert, their eldest son, and left the rest of the children to be cared for by Gran and their aunts.⁸

At the time Britain faced a relentless campaign by women and their male supporters for the right to vote. Shortly after arriving in the capital Andrew attended a formal dinner for Prime Ministers presided over by David Lloyd George. Before he could formally welcome his guests, a young man interrupted and asked Lloyd George when he would give women the right to vote. He was hurried away but further tension developed when another man rose as the South African Prime Minister was commencing his welcoming speech. He was seized by the toastmaster, only to discover that this man was Botha's English translator. The guests were amused but clearly the suffrage issue touched a raw nerve with many in the English establishment.⁹ Yet on 17 June Margaret Fisher and Rosin Batchelor (the wife of the Australian external affairs minister) joined organisers at the head of the Australian and New Zealand contingent in a 40000-strong suffrage procession through the streets of London. Although the British prime minister and his wife opposed votes for women, Andrew saw nothing wrong in having his wife campaign for this principle. He had already publicly received a deputation from the National Union of Women's Suffrage on 3 June because they knew he supported votes for women.¹⁰ While he was in South Africa the year before, he also had spoken to a women's group on how Australian women had already received the right to

⁶ Memoirs of Malcolm Shepherd, National Archives of Australia, Part 1.

⁷ Peggy Fisher, 1, 179.

⁸ Bastian, *Andrew Fisher*, 205-206.

⁹ George Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet*, Hutchinson, London, 1951, 88-89.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 4 June 1911.

vote.¹¹ This issue was, in the minds of the Fishers, an example of how Australia was ahead of most of the world in granting female suffrage.

On his return to Australia, Andrew would push for other assistance to women, the most noticeable being a Maternity Allowance paid for a live birth to any European woman. Aboriginal and Asian women were deliberately excluded from receiving the allowance and Andrew, in the age of White Australia, made no apology for such omissions. He saw the allowance as providing health services to women – hopefully they would use some of the money to have a doctor attend the birth. He had been able to afford one to attend all of Margaret's deliveries but recognised that many families could not afford this or the loss of wages from the woman no longer working after giving birth. Fisher had also long advocated women not only voting but standing for parliament and hoped that his party would lead the way in this regard. He was hampered by the fact that he had little control over the powerful state branches at the time which determined pre-selection of ALP candidates and largely ignored his request.¹²

The Fisher's eventually left Australia in late 1915 after Andrew had resigned as wartime prime minister to become High Commissioner in London. They returned to Australia for several months in 1921 before leaving again for England. They settled in Hampstead where Andrew, suffering from increasing mental and physical deterioration, died in 1928. By this stage, his decline was such that Margaret had assumed control of most of the family finances and over the education of their younger children. She did visit Australia in 1939 but later returned to England and died in the family home in 1958. Although three of the Fisher boys completed university degrees and the other two went into journalism with jobs provided by Keith Murdoch, a family friend, their sister, Peggy Fisher, never pursued any career. She spent many years as her mother's companion before returning to Australia after Margaret's death. Although seen as a colourful character with an interest in labour causes, Peggy in later interviews rued the fact that she had done so little with her life compared to her brothers.¹³ She possibly suffered either a learning disability or nervous depression and her parents were extremely protective of her, but the choices they made in terms of her future may not have necessarily been the right ones.

It is interesting that Margaret Fisher, a supporter of women's rights, in a sense could spend time on these matters because of the efforts of her mother and sisters in running her household and looking after her children. Yet she also drew great strength and comfort from this world of women and perhaps her reluctance to let Peggy go as an adult partly sprang from her long standing need for domestic female companionship. By that stage Gran, who had gone to England with them in 1915, had died on the return visit to Australia in 1921 and all Margaret's sisters were now married and had their own households. In contrast, Andrew certainly derived comfort from such a female world when it appeared to support his political career. However when his career came to an end during the 1920s, with his sons away at university or school, he became increasingly depressed by the lack of constant male company in what was essentially a female household. The Fishers' marriage, household arrangements and interests of women therefore remains an interesting study at a number of different levels.

A/Professor Peter Bastian

(ACU, School of Arts and Sciences, NSW)

¹¹ Bastian, *Andrew Fisher*, 202.

¹² Bastian, *Andrew Fisher* 237-240, 134-135.

¹³ Peggy Fisher was interviewed by Catherine Santamaria and this tape is located in the National Library of Australia, ID 1740398.

Letter from London

The 2009 History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland (H-WRBI) conference invited its participants to consider the theme of 'crossing boundaries' and the venue this year was the Bar Convent in York, the oldest convent in England and home to the sisters of Mary Ward. This is a special year for Mary Ward's congregations worldwide as sisters and friends celebrate the Jubilee for Mary Ward's foundation (1609-2009). We were proud to hold the conference at York and were privileged to enjoy, along with the usual conference events, special tours guided by **Patricia Harriss** CJ and **Christina Kenworthy-Browne** CJ of the Grade 1 listed Georgian building (dating from the 1760s) including the convent chapel. We appreciated the hospitality of the sisters and catering staff of the Bar Convent in York.

The first day of the conference aptly began with an illustrated talk by **Patricia Harriss** on 'Slate-coloured gowns and hoods: the origins and progress of the Bar Convent, York.' Patricia charted the 'secret beginnings' of Mary Ward's sisters in England to the current day as they continued 'crossing the boundaries into today's secular society'. **Christina Kenworthy-Browne** later shifted our focus to Mary Ward's companions, especially Mary Poyntz, who crossed very physical boundaries with Mary Ward as they journeyed along the Alpine crossings - steps that Christina had retraced last summer. **Laurence Lux-Sterritt** (LERMA, Aix-Marseille University, France) reminded us of the many 'quasi-religious' early modern English women who made private vows of chastity and obedience to their spiritual directors and whose active role in the English mission at times caused them to be labelled 'unwomanly'.

Several interdisciplinary papers explored the theme of 'crossing boundaries'. **Gweno Williams** of York St John University examined the plays written by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73), where female consecration and enclosure were imagined in convent settings. These secular plays, she considered, took on 'female self-determination, separateness and effective life choices for women in early modern England.' **Raphaël Ingelbien** of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven introduced us to another Protestant English female author, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), who sets her short story, *The Poor Clare*, (1856) in eighteenth-century England and Belgium and provides a 'subtle, qualified, but in the end surprisingly appreciative portrayal' of religious life in a milieu that is often seen as virulently anti-Catholic. Both these papers crossed the boundaries of Protestant and Catholic, intermingling lay and religious in literary texts. **Claire Renkin** from the Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne College of Divinity, brought her art history background to *The Painted Life of Mary Ward*. Through the lens of the visual image, she suggested that seventeenth-century viewers could interpret *The Painted Life* using the 'ancient trope of mystic marriage, in this case between Christ and the recumbent Mary.' **Katharine Sykes** of Harris Manchester College, Oxford, took us back to medieval England and the double houses of the Gilbertine order and probed the spatial boundaries of convent life using the conflicting evidence found in textual and later archaeological sources.

Women religious, especially Irish ones, crossed national boundaries also. **Jane Kelly** ibvm, introduced the audience to Mary Barry, Mother Gonzaga, the founder of the

Loreto Sisters in Australia, and explored, through her letters, her internationalism as she managed the relationship between the Australian branch and the mother house in Ireland. We travelled also to Tasmania. **Jo Brady rsj** of the Australian Catholic University, Canberra, used the Sisters of St Joseph as a case study to examine the 'motivation and impact' of the Irish women who joined the congregation in the 1930s and their enculturation into Tasmanian society. **Tim Allender** of the University of Sydney, NSW, took us to India to the foundation of the Loreto sisters from Rathfarnham, Ireland. Here, as educators they balanced the tensions between the requirements of the state and their own congregation adopting an 'accommodative approach to new female education mentalities emanating' while resisting Indian female schooling strategies.

Andrea Knox of Northumbria University brought us back to Europe and to early modern Spain, where we see the influence of Irish matronage. These early modern women religious founded 'significant networks of trade and education' and influenced art, architecture and female learning. **Susanne Malchau Dietz** of the University of Aarhus, Denmark used biography to demonstrate the power of the Irish Catholic diaspora through the life of Frances O'Connor (1859-1940), Mother Josephine of the Sacred Heart Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Josephs of Chambéry from Savoy.

We explored more contemporary issues with **Louise O'Reilly's** (National University of Ireland, Maynooth) paper on the development of the international union of Presentation Sisters and the tensions of diocesan and then international amalgamation. **Barbara Mann Wall** of the University of Pennsylvania took us almost to the present day with an examination of the U.S. Catholic hospital system, founded by Irish sisters, and the tensions of the involvement of Catholic hospitals in the provision of reproductive healthcare.

We ended the conference proceedings with a look into the possibilities of future scholarship as **Caroline Bowden** updated conference attendees on the status of the Who Were the Nuns Project (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council: <http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>) which will over the next few years make visible the early modern English nuns who crossed national boundaries in order to become women religious.

And, as has become somewhat of a tradition at our conferences, we celebrated with a book launch. This year we fêted the publication of **Pauline J. Shaw's** *Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer Franciscan Journalist* by Gracewing Press in a reception graciously sponsored by the Department of History, University of York.

Mark your calendars! At the General Meeting we announced the next two conferences:

* 3-4 September 2010 at Leuven Belgium - the Call for Paper should be sent before the end of the year

* 23-25 Jun 2011 at Queen Mary, University of London. This conference will be a Joint Conference with the 'Who were the Nuns?' project at Queen Mary, University of London.

Dr Carmen Mangion
Birkbeck College, University of London.

Book Reviews

M.R. MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition – New World: Dominican Sisters in Eastern Australia 1867-1958* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2009). 318 pp.

This scholarly and readable study is a significant contribution to the field of Australian religious history. It is a thoroughly researched and fascinating account of the faith and courage of the founding Dominican sisters, and of the countless other women who “laboured in the vineyard” during the first ninety years of the Australian foundation, and will be an invaluable gift to the Dominican congregation. At the same time, it serves to expand the perspectives of many of us whose affiliations have necessarily been limited to one or other of the many congregations of religious women who responded generously to calls for help from Australian Catholic bishops during those early years.

The book outlines the early thirteenth century emergence of the Dominican Order and its later Irish background. It was from Ireland that the sisters came in 1867 to establish the first Dominican foundation in Australia, at the invitation of Bishop James Murray of Maitland. The rapid expansion of the Dominican missions is vividly depicted, as is the sense of early colonial pioneering. In spite of an alien and often harsh environment, the sisters responded in extraordinary and innovative ways to local needs. Ultimately, a sense of belonging, “an assertion of their own colonial identity,” emerges.

From the beginning, the Dominican sisters focused almost exclusively on ministry within schools, with secondary and boarding colleges flourishing rapidly. Inevitably, this posed the need for more advanced academic as well as publicly recognized qualifications for teaching religious, and the Dominicans were among the earlier female religious in New South Wales to undertake university enrolment. Throughout this history, the author skillfully interweaves the theme of the Dominicans’ developing work for the education of hearing-impaired children – surely a unique role in “the pastoral mission of the Australian Church.” The opening of more schools for the deaf meant training of more teachers, as well as ongoing research into new methods, and the adaptation and establishment of their own methodologies. The unfolding story of this ministry, with its implications of generosity, dedication and courage, is itself enough to hold the reader spellbound.

This history concludes with the formation in 1958 of the Australian Union of Dominican Congregations. As the author explains, the book is necessarily an unfinished story, with many aspects and issues to be further explored and explicated. In presenting the study, Dr MacGinley has, as always, provided a superb incentive for further research.

Dr Kit Smith

Mary Ryllis Clark, *Loreto in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 332.

Christine E Burke, *Freedom, Justice and Sincerity: Reflections on the Life and Spirituality of Mary Ward*, ATF Press, Adelaide, 2009. Pp. ix + 144.

The present year, 2009, marks the 400th anniversary of Mary Ward’s teaching institute, which was to bring many years of conflict and suffering for her. The later 16th and early 17th centuries saw religiously committed women, in the tide of the Counter-Reformation, undertake educational initiatives at various levels. Mary’s met peculiar difficulties as she sought, for her active, Jesuit-inspired foundation, full canonical approbation – legally contracted by solemn vows – without the obligation of enclosure, a requirement for women re-affirmed at the Council of Trent two years before Mary’s birth. This was to prove an intractable difficulty, together with other complicating factors, stemming especially from

circumstances in England, where her active ministry there was considered by opponents as not only totally unsuitable to women but also as jeopardising already hazardous situations.

Difficulties in communication across Europe, where Mary had already established a number of schools, caused further misinterpretation and the Roman declaration that her institute be suppressed. Seeming disobedience to this edict led to Mary's imprisonment as a heretic until her release, with withdrawal of this charge, was decreed two months later by Urban VIII, who personally received her kindly in Rome. However, her vision had to wait a later day. Her few surviving communities continued as simple-vowed (then regarded essentially as secular) groups of women which a century later (1749) received a measure of papal recognition – a precedent which helped to pave the way for the full canonical approbation of simple-vowed, non-enclosed female congregations by the end of the 19th century.

Both the above books re-capitulate Mary's story as basic to their own specific topics – Mary Clark's, a comprehensive, extensively researched, tracing of the of the presence and ministry in Australia of the Loreto Sisters - as the Irish branch of Mary Ward's Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary came to be known - who came to Australia in 1875; Christine Burke's to provide a text for the many dedicated teachers – now predominantly lay – in schools under the IBVM auspices (of which the non-Loreto section is now known as the Congregatio Jesu). This latter book has much of value on spirituality, especially with regard to feminist issues, and effective evangelisation in contemporary society for a much wider readership. The first book, with its analysis of the educational vision and practical achievement of the Loretos' founding superior in Ballarat, Mother Gonzaga Barry, and of succeeding outstanding educators as their schools spread around Australia, makes a major contribution to women's history, as well as social and religious history in general. The final chapters, bringing the account up to the present, offers a valuable insight into this one congregation's ready adaptability to the inevitable changes of recent decades.

Dr Rosa MacGinley pbvm
(Golding Centre, ACU, Brisbane)

* * * * * **Of Interest** * * * * *

In the recent past in the English speaking world most Catholic women's scholarly historical research has focused on producing strongly contextualised histories of the various women's religious congregations as a basis for broader historical analysis. Presently, however, there has been appearing in the United States some interesting publications in the latter genre. The University of North Carolina Press in 2008 published *Catholic and Feminist – the surprising history of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* by Mary J.Henold and in 2009 *New Women of the Old Faith – Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* by Kathleen Sprows Cummings, assistant professor of American studies and associate director of the Cushwa Center for the study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana.

There are interesting signs also in the scholarship of the secular women's movement of recognition of religion as an integral aspect of human life which cannot be disregarded. Significant questions are being asked in the secular field such as "Is it possible for feminist engagement to avoid historicism, and why would they want to do so?" This is Claire Colebrook opening sentence in her essay "Stratigraphic Time, Women's Time" in *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol 24, No 61, Sept 2009, which in the last analysis leads to reflection on women's unchanging life cycle, which needs to be addressed more intelligently in marriage, education, work in the public arena and in political life at various levels.

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