

Roman Catholic Women Religious and Organizational Reform in English Canada:
The Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters in the Diocese of London, Ontario,
1950 - 1970

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.
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ABSTRACT

Renée D. Bondy. "Roman Catholic Women Religious and Organizational Reform in English Canada: The Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters in the Diocese of London, Ontario, 1950 - 1970." PhD thesis, University of Waterloo, 2007.

Adding to a growing body of research on women and religion in English Canada, this historical study offers a glimpse inside convent culture in 1950s and '60s Ontario, an area seldom studied by Canadian historians. The oral histories of two teaching communities in the Diocese of London, Ontario - the Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union and the Ontario Province of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary - as well as textual records from their convent archives, form the basis of this study. This thesis seeks to examine both the external and internal factors which precipitated reforms to convent life during the 1950s and 1960s, that is, the years preceding and immediately surrounding the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church. The external factors on reform include the pre-conciliar and conciliar mandates of the institutional Church, as well as social factors such as educational reform and changes in the roles of women throughout the postwar period. The more internal factors affecting change include shifts in sisters' communal and individual identities and changes in spirituality. Taken together, these catalysts of change are reflective of the interplay of religious belief, institutional power and gender in postwar Canadian Roman Catholicism. Analyses of Church mandates, community responses, convent discourses on girls and women, and the spiritual reading practices of sisters throughout this period of significant change reveal that the reform efforts of religious communities were not only official and prescribed, but were also unofficial and grassroots in nature.

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PROLOGUE¹

It is a Saturday afternoon, 1959. A young nun kneels in the foyer of the Mother House, scrub-brush in hand, scouring the terrazzo floor. The floor gleams, and the woman can see her reflection in the waxed surface. Her nose and cheeks are deep pink, as are her knuckles, though under the layers of the floor-length black habit and work apron she is warm and well protected from the draft.

She scrubs the floor in an orderly manner, one four-foot square at a time, beginning in the front corner of the broad entrance hall, and working from left to right. Despite the dull ache in her lower back, there is a certain satisfaction in the act of cleaning, and it provides a rare moment alone in this busy communal life. She attempts to pray as she works: *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, . . .* but her thoughts drift so easily to other matters. There are chemistry and mathematics lessons to prepare for Monday, tests to grade, a small tear in her cloak that wants mending. . . . *Benedicta tu in mulieribus. . .*

As instructed, she spreads pages of newsprint across the newly washed areas, creating a path from the doorway to the grille; should a visitor enter the convent, he or she need not soil the clean floor. The nun's eyes are characteristically downcast, though this was a practice not easily acquired by the naturally confident and curious young woman. When the Sister-Portress passes by to accept a delivery at the door, the younger sister does not look up from her work, but continues methodically.

Minutes pass. The silence of the convent is enveloping, creating a sense of timelessness, such as one would feel in the glow of a camp fire, or reclining in a gently rocking rowboat. . . . *et benedictus fructus ventris tui Iesus . . .* As the scrub-brush works

¹The Prologue is a fictionalized account of an incident relayed by Anne Denomy, O.S.U., interview by author, audiotape recording, Stratford, Ontario, 26 October 2004, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

its way toward the door, the sister's eyes follow its steady progress. Occasionally, her gaze wavers; she sees the sheets of newsprint, now just within the periphery of her vision. Glancing over at them she thinks back to her childhood, to the image of her father sitting in his easychair after work, reading the daily paper. Sometimes at dinner he would make comment on the day's headlines, and after dessert he would take her onto his lap and together they would solve the crossword puzzle.

As the young sister reaches the edge of the row of papers, she glances over, just for a second, and takes in the headline: CASTRO'S COMMUNIST CUBA. 'Who's Castro?,' she wonders, and continues scrubbing. She looks over at the paper again, longer this time, and reads the first few sentences of the article. Before long she is leaning over the page, reading furiously down the columns, swallowing whole the news of the world laid there before her on the foyer floor. A quiet click-click-click behind her alerts her to the approach of the Sister-Portress. She quickly returns to her work. . . . *Sancta Maria mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus . . .*

The pink of the young sister's cheeks turns to crimson as she returns to scrubbing, now at a vigorous pace. Did the Sister-Portress notice her reading, and would she report the young sister to Mother Superior? Would she then confess her sin at the communal chapter of faults, humbling herself before her fellow sisters, kneeling before Reverend Mother and requesting penance? Did God really care if she read the paper, just for that one moment, since it broke only the laws of man, and not the law of God? Would these temptations never cease? . . . *nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen. . . . Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui Iesus. Sancta Maria mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen. . . .*

INTRODUCTION

Forty-seven years have passed. I sit in the same convent, in a comfortably appointed meeting room just two stories above the foyer, speculating on the young sister's experience. Did she confess to the sin of disobedience? Did she repeat her transgression the next Saturday, and the next? Was she the only sister to read the newspaper without permission, or were there others who took advantage of such stolen moments? What did it feel like to kneel on the terrazzo, in the heavy serge habit? Was scrubbing the floor a drudgery, or a prayer, or both? How did it feel to read about the world outside when living within the cloister? Did she miss her family, dinners around the diningroom table, the jokes and debates and sharing of days? Did she miss tennis shoes and lipstick and record albums? Did her love of God fill a void or create a longing? Did she ever dare to share her experiences, her thoughts or her desires with a like-minded sister?

The young sister in the preceding vignette is now almost seventy years old. She lives in a house with two other sisters. She wears blue jeans, reads mystery novels, and occasionally enjoys a cold beer. Now semi-retired, she is a part-time financial officer, and she volunteers at a local outreach centre. In sharing her reflections with me, she recalled the surreptitious reading of the newspaper with an almost incredulous tone - as though it had been someone else kneeling in the convent foyer. So much has changed in less than five decades.

Not only has the aforementioned sister's life changed in myriad ways, but most women religious¹ throughout the world have witnessed appreciable changes to their lives in

¹Throughout the body of this thesis the terms 'women religious' and 'sisters' will be used interchangeably; the former is somewhat more official, and the latter more common and easily recognizable as it is also the customary address for women religious. The term 'religious', when used as a noun, refers to men and women who have taken vows committing themselves to religious life. While some primary and

the latter half of the twentieth century. Gone are the traditional trappings of convent culture - the medieval habits, the grille, Grand Silence, and rigid horaria. In a striking parallel to lay women, the years following the Second Vatican Council saw women religious expand their traditional occupations; like their secular counterparts, no longer are sisters' roles confined to teaching and nursing, housekeeping and clerical work.

Despite the reforms which have been implemented in recent decades, many people in Western culture have romantic notions of these women in flowing black habits. Antiquated though they are, traditional images of women religious are enticing and enduring. Fed by popular images in films, like *The Nun's Story*, or *The Sound of Music*, or even more recently, *Sister Act*, we see these women as 'set apart' from the world, to one degree or another.² Yet the 'cloister' which enclosed these women for centuries was, in many cases, radically altered in the 1960s. While romanticized images from North American popular culture persist, today's reality for most non-contemplative women religious is a way of life that stands in

secondary sources use the term 'nuns' interchangeably with 'women religious' and 'sisters', the term 'nun' is more properly reserved as a descriptor for monastic religious who take solemn vows, observe strict cloister, and live lives of silence, prayer and contemplation; as such, I have not adopted it as a term to describe the more active women's communities in this work.

In the official parlance of the Roman Catholic Church, 'sister' is used to describe a member of a religious 'congregation'. The groups of women religious in this study are religious 'congregations', rather than 'orders'. No 'orders', that is religious groups officially chartered by the pope and exempt from episcopal jurisdiction over their affairs, have been permitted since 1752. Since 1752, all groups founded by women have been 'congregations' - that is, institutes of women who profess vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, live a common life, and are engaged in active ministry to the needs of society. I most often refer to the groups of women I study as being members of religious 'communities'; this is the terminology employed by the sisters themselves to refer to their congregations, and it also includes the 'associates' of the congregation, auxiliary lay-members who share the vision and ministry of the community.

²For more on the image of the nun in popular culture see Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

stark contrast to the convent life of the pre-Vatican II era.

Both well-known and lesser-known sisters provide examples of the non-traditional roles adopted by women religious in recent decades. Margaret Traxler, S.S.N.D., gained fame across North America for her social justice endeavours, including her active participation in the American Civil Rights movement, marching alongside Dr. Martin Luther King in Selma, Alabama; her well-documented, vocal and candid pro-choice stance; and the founding of two Chicago-area homeless shelters for women. Helen Prejean, C.S.J., on whose life the film *Dead Man Walking* is based, has become well known as an author and an advocate for death row inmates. Theresa Kane, R.S.M., attracted global media attention during Pope John Paul II's 1979 visit to the United States for what has been touted in the media as 'the Kane mutiny': in a speech, Kane addressed the issue of women's ordination by urging the pontiff to be open to and accepting of women in the church as full, participating members. Agnes Mary Mansour, R.S.M., appointed Director of the Michigan Department of Social Services in 1982, was thrust into the media spotlight when she refused to acquiesce to the Church's demands to either forfeit her administrative position or renounce her membership in her community. (This was precipitated by the Vatican's opposition to the State's Medicaid funding of abortions.) Jeannine Grammick, S.S.N.D., has been frequently chastised by the Vatican for her ministry to gays and lesbians, yet she continues to write and speak on the issue of homosexuality.

An entire community of women, members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, shattered stereotypes of women religious and grabbed the attention of the popular media in 2001 with the publication of David Snowdon's *Aging With Grace*, a summary of his research with the community, ongoing since 1986. A unique control group, hundreds of sisters with the SSND community are participants in Snowdon's project, the aim of which is to study the

effects of lifestyle, education and health factors on the development of Alzheimer's disease.³

The sisters have even gone so far as to agree to donate their brains to the project upon their deaths in order to further this important research on Alzheimer's disease.

In my own journeys over the past few years conducting historical research with numerous, if lesser known, women religious, I have met many who challenge the traditional stereotype of the Roman Catholic sister. May O'Hanlan, O.S.U., volunteers with an HIV/AIDS outreach organization in Stratford, Ontario, and she does not bat an eye when asked to participate in drives to distribute condoms in local bars. Suzanne Mallette, S.N.J.M., a registered massage therapist in Windsor, Ontario, began her healing touch ministry as an outgrowth of her prison work with HIV-positive inmates. I have met and heard stories of sisters who work in street outreach programs, women's shelters, food banks, and sisters who serve with groups ranging from UN commissions to feminist spirituality centres; just a few decades ago these activities would have been unheard of.

Not only are historians, like myself, beginning to take notice of sisters, their lives and their stories, but the recent heightened interest in women's religious communities is evident across the disciplines. My own enthusiasm for the topic mirrors that of contemporary journalists, memoirists, novelists, epidemiologists and film-makers whose interest in women religious has inspired numerous popular productions.⁴ Canadian historians, as we shall see

³David Snowdon, *Aging With Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Living Longer, Healthier and More Meaningful Lives* (New York: Bantam, 2001); also see Michael Lemonick and Alice Park, "The Nun Study" in *Time*, Canadian Edition (May 14, 2001), 40-49.

⁴See journalist Cheryl Reed, *Unveiled: The Hidden Lives of Nuns* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004); also journalist Kristin Ohlson, *Stalking the Divine* (New York: Penguin, 2005); see Kathleen Norris's memoir *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996); theologian Karen Armstrong's memoir, *The Spiral Staircase* (Toronto: Knopf, 2004); for novels see Susan J. Leonardi, *And Then They Were Nuns* (London: University of Manchester Press, 2003); scientific/epidemiological studies

later in this Introduction, though they have been somewhat reticent to delve into the history of women religious, have, in recent decades, made significant forays into the subject. This heightened interest in women religious is, no doubt, a direct effect of the momentous reforms to religious life in recent decades.

The reforms which Roman Catholic women's religious communities undertook in the 1960s were far-reaching and seemingly rapid. Within a decade of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), women religious changed their forms of governance, their decision-making processes, their traditional modes of dress, and the routines of their daily living. They articulated new self-understandings, redefined the directions of their traditionally sanctioned works (or 'apostolates'), and entered into unprecedented spiritual renewal. Like other Catholics around the globe, they also adapted to changes in liturgy and theology, such as the celebration of the mass in the vernacular and a new understanding of the Church as the 'People of God.'

An exploration of the changes which occurred in the two largest teaching communities of Roman Catholic women religious in the Diocese of London, Ontario - the Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary of the Ontario Province - will reveal the ways in which both external and internal factors influenced reform between 1950 and 1975. The external factors, broadly defined, are twofold. First, the reform mandates of the Roman Catholic Church, from pronouncements made in 1950 to the documents of the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s, urged

include Snowdon, *Aging With Grace*; popular films include *Agnes of God* (Norman Jewison, dir., 1985), *Sister Act* (Emile Ardolino, dir., 1992), *Dead Man Walking* (Tim Robbins, dir., 1995), *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, dir., 2002); documentary films include *Behind the Veil*, (National Film Board of Canada, Margaret Wescott, dir., 1984) and *Poverty, Chastity, Obedience* (National Film Board of Canada, Cornelia Principe, dir., 2002).

orders toward self-directed changes in such areas as dress and governance. Second, the influence of the practice and thought of second-wave feminism flourishing in the same time period had significant bearing on the shape and direction of reform. The more ‘internal’ factors which affected reform, including shifts in communities’ and individuals’ self-definitions and understandings and changes in spirituality, though more subtle, are also key in understanding reform in women’s religious communities. These external and internal catalysts of change reveal much about the interplay of religious belief, institutional power and gender in Roman Catholicism from the 1950s to the present.

It is my hope that this research will contribute a much needed chapter to the story of the history of women religious, particularly in English-speaking Canada. Canadian women’s history has become a vibrant and complex field over the past four decades, broadening our awareness of women’s roles in history and contesting essentialist understandings of gender roles; yet, some unexamined ‘grey areas’ remain. Historians of women have introduced us to many of Canada’s ‘Great Women’, who often transgressed the traditionally defined public/private realms, and they have also told the stories of lesser-known women whose paid and unpaid work, both in and out of the home, had not previously been recognized. Seldom, however, have Canadian historians studied women’s religious communities, particularly those in English-speaking Canada. The Canadian context is a particularly salient one within which to study reform in women’s religious communities, given the country’s rich Roman Catholic heritage.⁵ At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics comprised 45% of

⁵See the section of Chapter One titled “A Short History of Women and Religious Life” for more on the establishment and growth of women religious in Canada, and brief histories of the Ursuline and Holy Names communities. For comprehensive histories of Canadian Roman Catholicism see Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin, eds., *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Terence J. Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002).

the total Canadian population, making Roman Catholicism the largest religious denomination in the country.⁶ (While a comparable percentage of Canadians identify as Roman Catholics today,⁷ Church attendance among Roman Catholics in Canada declined appreciably beginning in the early 1970s, from an estimated 75% in the mid-1960s,⁸ to 42% in English-Canada at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁹)

An examination of women religious and 1960s' conciliar reform in the Southwestern Ontario Diocese of London, established more than a century earlier in 1854, affords a glimpse into the role of women religious in English-Canada in a region whose population in the latter half of the twentieth century was fully one-third Roman Catholic,¹⁰ and whose Ontario separate schools were supported by Catholics of French, British, Italian, Ukranian and other ethnic origins. Although the roles played by Ursuline and Holy Names sisters in education is not a primary focus of this thesis, their shared commitment to teaching and the resultant similarities in the routines of their daily lives create a meaningful context within which to draw comparisons among their experiences.

Historical analysis of the experiences of women religious, women whose daily lives and work sit, sometimes awkwardly, on the cusp of the public/private divide, provides unique

⁶Census of Canada, 1961, vol. 7:11-4, 11-5, as cited in Brian Clarke, "English Speaking Canada from 1854," *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, 356.

⁷Consistent with 1960s' statistics, Terence Fay estimated that, in 2002, Roman Catholics comprised about 46% of the Canadian population. Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics*, xii.

⁸Reginald W. Bibby, *The Bibby Report* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995), 124.

⁹Reginald Bibby, "Who Says God is Dead?" *Workopolis*, 17 April 2006. <http://www.workopolis.com/servlet/Content/qprinter/20060417/CORELIG17>, accessed 11 November 2006.

¹⁰Roman Catholic Diocese of London Website, <http://www.rcec.london.on.ca/info.htm>, accessed February 15, 2007.

insights into women's roles, work, self-understandings, and community life. Examination of the grassroots nature of some aspects of reform in women's religious communities in the Vatican II era implies a relationship between these religious communities and the commitments of 1960s secular feminism. In a broader context, this research seeks to advance the study of religion as an important facet of women's history and, as the historiography demonstrates, this is an area which, though growing, remains much in need of academic research.

The Historiographic Context

American historian Ann Braude sees an inherent and fundamental relationship between women and religious history. "The story begins when women are there," she asserts. "Where women are present, religion flourishes, where they are absent, it does not."¹¹ Braude's contention is based on the view that women, who invariably form the majority in the pews and hold the primary responsibility of imparting religious training and education to children and youth, have the greatest influence on religion's development. This is true, argues Braude, despite the fact that men have held, and in many instances continue to monopolize, positions of leadership, influence, and power in religious institutions. Braude encourages historians to view women's roles in religious history as not only significant, but also as *essential* to the growth and survival of religion and its institutions.

Until recent decades, this perspective has not been reflected in the writing of North American religious history. As historian Mark McGowan observed in his 1990 historiographic essay "Coming Out of the Cloister: Some Reflections on Developments in the Study of Religion in Canada, 1980-1990," Canadian historians have tended "to see religion

¹¹Ann Braude, "Women's History *Is* American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, Thomas A. Tweed, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 92.

as Church, and church as its clergy and leadership, be it corporate or episcopal.”¹² Beginning in the 1990s, however, the sub-field of the history of women and religion began to take shape within the larger field of women’s history, and in the past few decades historians have acknowledged the agency of women in their roles as missionaries, teachers, ministers and members of church organizations;¹³ further, these studies have considered the impact of women’s actions within larger social and intellectual milieus.¹⁴ With few exceptions, however, the history of women religious has been excluded from the scope of academic

¹²Mark McGowan, “Coming Out of the Cloister: Some Reflections on Developments in the Study of Religion in Canada, 1980-1990,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1-2 (Spring/Fall, 1990): 180.

¹³Several contributions to the history of Protestant women missionaries have been made in recent years; for example, Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), and *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa* (Vancouver and Toronto: U.B.C. Press, 2002); also see Rosemary Gagan, *Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881 - 1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992); regarding Native-missionary history, see Karen Anderson, *Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in 17th Century New France* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002). The history of women’s religious institutions and schools have received attention; for example, in Sharon Anne Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow: The Women's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Johanna M. Selles, *Methodists and Women's Education in Ontario, 1836-1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); and Gloria L. Neufeld Redekop, *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women's Societies in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996). For a history of women and ministry in the Methodist tradition, see Elizabeth Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early 19th Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

¹⁴Recently, religion, family, gender, and identity are explored in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1730-1969* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); see also Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

history. In both the North American and international contexts, while non-professional historians and Church historians documented the lives of Roman Catholic women's religious communities for centuries, *scholarly* studies of women religious and their work have been somewhat slower to emerge. A brief survey of the historical writing on women religious uncovers the reasons for this delay, illustrates recent trends and influences in the study of women and religion, and demonstrates the urgent need for further study of the history of women religious.

The first historical narratives written about women religious, both in Canada and abroad, were written by the sisters themselves. As Elizabeth Smyth describes in the essay, “‘Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries’: Women Religious Recording and Writing History,” women religious were among the first to write women's history in Canada. In her study of the Ursulines of the Chatham Union, the Religious of the Precious Blood and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, Smyth reveals that religious communities had mandates to preserve their past which were embedded in the organizations' constitutions. This led to extensive record-keeping by women religious, often in the form of ‘annals’ which were written by the sisters themselves for use within the community.¹⁵ Additionally, scrapbooks, newsletters, school annuals, obituaries and necrologies, poems, and historical dramas, composed for both documentary and spiritual purposes, served as records of the communities' histories.

In the twentieth century, many communities produced their own comprehensive histories.¹⁶ For example, The Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union authorized members to

¹⁵Elizabeth Smyth, “‘Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries’: Women Religious Recording and Writing History,” in *Creating Historical Memory: English Canadian Women and the Work of History*, B. Boutilier and A. Prentice, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 103-4; 106-9.

¹⁶Countless examples of such histories exist worldwide. Most recently in Canada is a 950-page history of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of

write three such compilations - a Master's thesis on the origins of the community written in the early 1930s;¹⁷ *From Desenzano to "The Pines"*, an extensive history of the Ursulines, published in 1941;¹⁸ and a recent two-volume history, *Pilgrims in Service*.¹⁹ Also of significance is lay-historian Patricia Skidmore's volume on Brescia College, the Ursuline women's college affiliated with the University of Western Ontario.²⁰ The Holy Names Sisters of the Ontario Province published their history, *Rooted in Hope*, in 1983.²¹ While these histories were produced primarily for the communities themselves, they also served to educate the local populations in the sisters' schools, parishes, communities, and dioceses. These 'insider' histories function as important precursors to subsequent scholarly studies.

In the larger international ecclesial context, much of the Church history written about women religious was hagiographical, documenting the extraordinary lives of the founders of orders or other significant holy women who might be worthy of canonization. University libraries, municipal libraries, and church and convent libraries abound with biographies of saintly and sainted women. Amateur and academic historians alike have penned countless

Newfoundland: Katherine E. Bellamy, R.S.M., *Weavers of the Tapestry* (St. John's: Flanker Press, 2006).

¹⁷Smyth, "Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries'," 113-114.

¹⁸Mother St. Paul Coveny, *From Desenzano to "The Pines"* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1941).

¹⁹Sister Margaret Pray, *Pilgrims in Service: The Chatham Ursulines, Volume 1 - 1860 -1896* (Chatham: Chamberlain Press, 1991); *Pilgrims in Service: The Chatham Ursulines, Volume 2 - 1896 - 1984* (Chatham: Chamberlain Press, 2001).

²⁰Patricia G. Skidmore, *Brescia College, 1919-1979* (London, Ontario: Brescia College, 1980).

²¹Sister John Thomas (Helen) Batte, S.N.J.M. *Rooted In Hope: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary of the Ontario Province* (Windsor: Windsor Print & Litho Ltd., 1983).

traditional hagiographic biographies of popular women saints; for example, among the most popular women saints, Therese of Lisieux has *thousands* of devotional biographies written in her honour. Numerous such works on Canadian women religious have been and continue to be produced. Over the past century, figures such as Marguerite Bourgeoys (foundress of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal), Marguerite d'Youville (the Montreal Grey Nuns' Foundress), and Marie d'Incarnation (an Ursuline, and the first woman religious to settle in New France) have been immortalized in the devotional press, often with the enthusiastic support of their respective communities.²²

²²Books on such women religious as Marguerite Bourgeoys, Marguerite d'Youville, and Marie de l'Incarnation have been produced throughout Canadian history, and were most prevalent during the years of nineteenth-century ultramontane Catholicism, and the period of 1950s' devotionalism through to the post-Vatican II era. The listings below include translations of these women's original writings, biographies written by prominent clergy and by women religious themselves. (Note that convent customs dictated that publications written by women religious were either credited to unnamed authors or to the community as a whole.) The laity also figure prominently as biographers and devotional writers within this genre.

For biographies of Marguerite Bourgeoys, see especially Michel E. Faillon, *Vie de la souer Bourgeoys, fondatrice de la Congrégation do Notre-Dame de Villemarie en Canada suivie de l'histoire de cet institut jusqu'a ce jour* (Villemarie: Soeurs de la Congregation de Notre-Dame, 1853); Religieuse, *The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois foundress of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, established at Montreal, Canada, 1659*, translated by a religieuse (New York: D & J Stadler, 1886); Yvon Charron, *Mère Bourgeoys, 1620-1700*, (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1950); Florence Quigley, *In the Company of Marguerite Bourgeoys* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1982).

For biographies of Marguerite d'Youville, see D. S. Ramsay, *Life of the Venerable M.-M. Dufrost le Lajemmerais, Mde. D'Youville, foundress of the Sisters of Charity (called Grey Nuns) of Montreal, Canada* (Montreal: Printed at the Gray Nunnery, 1895); Estelle Mitchell, *Elle a beaucoup amié: vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite d'Youville, fondatrice des Soeurs de la Charité, 1701-1771* (Montreal: Fides, 1957); Mary Pauline Fitts, G.N.S.H., *Hands to the Needy: Blessed Marguerite d'Youville, apostle to the poor* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).

For biographies of Marie de l'Incarnation, see Religious of the Ursuline Community, *The life of the Venerable Mother Mary of the Incarnation joint foundress and first Superior of the Ursulines of Quebec* (Dublin; London: J. Duffey, 1880); Henri-Raymond Casgrain, *Histoire de la vénérable mère Marie de l'Incarnation: première supérieure des Ursulines de la Nouvelle-France* (Québec: Léger Brousseau, 1882) Agnes Repplier, *Mère Marie of the Ursulines: a study in adventure* (New York:

While these devotional biographies have spiritual and literary value, hagiographical sources have been approached by late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars with a critical eye and with careful consideration of other primary sources found in religious communities' archives. As historian Elizabeth Rapley notes, hagiography was intended to "preach only to the converted. It had no intention of reaching across the great divide, to tell the world what it was really like to live in community under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience."²³ Historians, like Rapley, writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, recognize that the monastic women religious of much earlier centuries, although cloistered, were, in many ways, physically connected to the larger society.

They shared many of its customs and practices. They employed the same notaries, doctors, and legal advisors. They drank the same water and patronized the same butchers and grocers. They approached the problems of child rearing, nursed and medicated their sick, and attended their dying much the same way as 'the world' did. In fact, the records they kept about these things, at a time when women as a whole seldom wrote much about daily life, can provide useful information on life not only in the cloister but also in the larger community that swirled around it only a stone wall away.²⁴

This portrait of religious life is made possible by Rapley's astute use of traditional hagiography in interpreting archival sources. It is in such work that traditional Church history meets social history.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw fields of social history increase in popularity, and feminist scholars soon expanded the parameters of historical inquiry to include questions about gender relations, work, and women's private and public lives. This broadening of

Grosset and Dunlap, 1931.); Denis Mahoney, *Marie of the Incarnation, mystic and Missionary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964); Lionel Groulx, *La grande dame de notre histoire: esquisse pour un portrait* (Montreal: Fides, 1966).

²³Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 4.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 8.

historical inquiry coincided with unprecedented changes within religious communities as a result of the specific ecclesial reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council.²⁵ As restrictive habits, rigid routines, and cloister walls were abandoned in favour of a more modern, open approach to daily living, so, too, did North American women religious become more receptive toward sociological and historical research.

In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, several American sociologists, theologians, and historians - some sisters themselves - contributed important works in the area of the history of women religious. Sociologists Helen Ebaugh and Patricia Wittberg have published studies on the change and decline in women's religious communities in the post-Vatican II era, and these provide key insights and valuable quantitative sources for scholars working in this period.²⁶ As early as 1977 sociologist-theologian Joan Chittister produced *Climb Along the Cutting Edge*, a seminal study of 1960s reform in her own Benedictine community, one of the largest in the United States. American historian Mary Ewens's essay "Women in the Convent" appeared in the 1989 publication *Women in American Catholicism*. Ewens offers a brief yet sweeping history of American women religious, including their experiences in the Vatican II era. Providing a comprehensive popular history of women religious in the United States, George Stewart's *Marvels of Charity* reflects the regional, ethnic, and socio-economic

²⁵The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) issued *Perfectae Caritatis*, the "Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life," which encouraged religious orders to implement reforms in the areas of dress, daily life, and organizational structure. This will be examined in depth in Chapter 1.

²⁶See Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993); also, Helen Rose Ebaugh, Jon Lorence, Janet Saltzman Chafetz. "The Growth and Decline of the Population of Catholic Nuns Cross-Nationally, 1960-1990: A Case of Secularization as Social Structural Change," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35 (1996): 171-83; Patricia Wittberg, *The Rise and Decline of Catholic Religious Orders: A Social Movement Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

diversity of American sisters' experience and the rich contributions of numerous orders to American culture from the sixteenth to the late twentieth century. Carol Garibaldi Rogers's *Poverty, Chastity and Change*, a collection of oral histories of women religious from more than forty different religious communities, offers a unique account of sisters' experiences in twentieth-century American life. Like Rogers's compilation, Curb and Manahan's *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* is a unique record of the oral narratives of sisters and it tells the first-hand stories of women religious who identify as lesbian, many of whom had left their orders at the time of publication. This daring foray into the area of women religious and sexuality is indicative of the ways in which this particular sub-field of women's history has stimulated previously unasked questions which cross disciplinary boundaries. Elizabeth Abbot's *The History of Celibacy* (1999), much broader in geographic and thematic scope, includes discussion of vowed celibacy and women religious and its spiritual, sexual, and psychological significance.²⁷

The thorough social histories of the aforementioned North American scholars have not only written women religious into the record; they have also contributed much meaningful gendered analysis to the expanding field of women's history. Yet, while these important works of recent decades served to include women religious in the larger project of women's history, they did not actively challenge or supercede centuries-old patterns of traditional Church history. In the mid-1990s, however, a new analytic discussion emerged in

²⁷Joan Chittister et. al., *Climb Along the Cutting Edge: An Analysis of Change in Religious Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); Mary Ewans, "Women in the Convent," in *American Catholic Women*, ed. Karen Kennelly (New York, 1989), 17-47; George C. Stewart, *Marvels of Charity: History of American Sisters and Nuns* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994); Carole Garibaldi Rogers, *Poverty, Chastity and Change* (New York: Twayne, 1996); Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan, *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1985); Elizabeth Abbott, *A History of Celibacy*. (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1999).

the historiography as scholars began to challenge dominant paradigms and to inform previously sacrosanct Church histories. Susan Maloney's essay, "Historical Perspectives on Women Religious: Implications for Creating a Feminist Theology of Religious Life," provides an astute analysis of the traditional historiographic approaches employed by Church historians in recording the lives of women. Maloney argues that the Church history which has been traditionally used to understand women religious has been constructed for the purpose of explaining the male experience of religious life, and that this has serious implications, not only for history, but for theological development as well:

Male dominated history, its interpretation and its use in the construction of an historical paradigm to describe the development of religious life have kept the experience of women from its rightful place in the construction of a theology of religious life for women.²⁸

Maloney criticises the "Hostie-Cada" paradigm of religious history. This model of religious history divides the experiences of religious into five eras: "the flight into the desert, the age of the monastics, the mendicant era, the age of the apostolic orders, and the age of the teaching congregations," each of which supposedly represents a "natural" evolutionary stage in the development of religious orders.²⁹ This organizational model has been used in ecclesiastical scholarship since its inception more than three decades ago by French historian Raymond Hostie and sociologist Raymond Cada. Despite its widespread use in the histories of both male and female religious, contemporary women's historians have argued that the Hostie-Cada model, which supports a patriarchal Church history, is an inadequate structure within which to record the history of women's religious communities. The Hostie-Cada

²⁸Susan Marie Maloney, "Historical Perspectives on Women Religious: Implications for Creating a Feminist Theology of Religious Life," in *Women & Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 137.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 138.

model does not completely ignore the histories of women religious; however, because it is a schema structured around the achievements of men, it often ignores or renders invisible the initiatives and accomplishments of women. Maloney provides the following illustration:

Brigit of Kildare is cited as the foundress of a double monastery (women and men) in fifth century (480) Ireland. However, because her life falls within the Hostie periodization for the age of the desert . . . Brigit's name and achievement receive no recognition in the development of religious life. Despite the clear evidence that Brigit headed a double monastery approximately fifty years prior to Benedict, Cada and associates fail to confront the question of whether or not Brigit rather than Benedict is the initiator of monastic religious life.³⁰

The failure to write the history of religious using a periodization that includes both genders has distorted the history of women religious. This widely-accepted model offers only one perspective on religious life which "supports the understanding that the lives of women religious will develop and change along the same lines as those of men."³¹

Historian Jo Ann McNamara seeks to rectify this corruption of history by setting the historical narratives of women religious within more objective models of periodization. McNamara's comprehensive international history of women religious, *Sisters in Arms*, does not follow Hostie-Cada periodization, but proceeds through five conventional historical periods: the Roman Empire, the Early and High Middle Ages, and the Early Modern and Modern Eras. Because she does not force the narratives of women religious to conform to a periodization which does not suit their temporal and developmental experiences, McNamara is able to recognize sisters' accomplishments and struggles both independent of and relative to their male counterparts. McNamara is cognizant of traditional Church history's previous injustices to these women:

³⁰Ibid., 139.

³¹Ibid., 140.

Against all reasonable evidence, monastic historians refused to see anything but their cloister walls and enveloping veils. Reasoning that women do not build institutions or conquer new worlds or make history, the scribes who shape the past have ignored their untidy existence or simply accorded it a hasty nod before pressing forward with the more readily accessible history of male institutions.³²

Maloney posits that McNamara's history of women religious yields valuable suggestions regarding questions of gender and power within the Roman Catholic Church today.

[McNamara's work] places the tensions between present day women religious and the Church hierarchy relative to autonomy in an historical context which values women's experience. It also provides insight into the relationship between male control over women and the institutionalization which accompanies it.³³

McNamara and Maloney have created a place for women in a revised Church history, and this permits a reconsideration of power structures within the institutional Church. At the turn of the twenty-first century, North American historians studying women religious are benefiting from a confluence of social history (especially women's history), Church history, and cultural history, and American recent publications demonstrate increasing complexity. Lora Ann Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner's *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters*, records the often tumultuous history of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and their role in American sisters' navigation of the Vatican II and post-Vatican II years.³⁴ Carol Coburn and Martha Smith's history of the St. Joseph Sisters of Carondelet, *Spirited Lives*, examines the influence of women religious on American Catholic culture from

³²Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2-3.

³³Maloney, "Historical Perspectives on Women Religious," 141.

³⁴Lora Ann Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth-century.³⁵ Rebecca Sullivan's recent *Visual Habits* considers the impact of images of women religious on popular culture in post-war America.³⁶ Additionally, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns*, by Elizabeth Kuhns, is consistent with the rise in interest in nuns as cultural iconography.³⁷ The publication *Building Sisterhood: A Feminist History of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* is particularly noteworthy among recent American publications. This is a collaborative work by IHM sisters, most of whom have notoriety as writers, university professors, and chairs of national and international organizations. Perhaps this IHM publication is an indication that historical writing on women religious is coming 'full circle', as women religious compose updated and revised community histories; yet, this time they do so from feminist and spiritual perspectives and without the strictures of conventional Church history or hagiography. Not only is *Building Sisterhood* an effective synthesis of women's, Church, and cultural histories, but it also incorporates discussions of spirituality previously lacking in historical writing on women religious. It is this particular direction that inspires aspects of this thesis, and that will hopefully direct other historians to make spiritual experience of women a key factor of analysis in historical writing.

The rich history of women in religious life in Canada and the sizable Roman Catholic population and influence in this country relative to the United States makes the need for scholarship in the area of women and religion in Canada particularly pressing. Broad

³⁵Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2.

³⁶Sullivan, *Visual Habits*.

³⁷Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

international studies of women religious, such as Jo Ann McNamara's *Sisters in Arms*, have laid a solid groundwork for more in-depth national and regional histories. Further, while the European heritage of Canadian communities, like that of the Chatham Ursulines examined in this thesis, has been well documented by both hagiographers and historians,³⁸ further historical writing on the growth and contributions of these communities in North American context will only serve to enrich and expand upon the international literature.

More than a decade has passed since Ruth Compton Brouwer challenged Canadian historians to transcend the "unacknowledged quarantine" on women and religion,³⁹ and, while scholarly writing on the history of women and religion has expanded, there are many aspects of this fascinating sub-field, including the study of women religious, which have yet to be pursued in depth. In the early 1990s, Brouwer noted that prior to the 1987 publication of Marta Danylewycz's *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1984-1920*, "there was not a single scholarly monograph on the subject, and as the subtitle of her book made clear, Danylewycz was concerned only with Quebec women."⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Danylewycz's work marked a new direction in the study of women and religion in Canada. She saw the potential to merge the vibrant fields of women's history with the new social history. Her research on women religious in Quebec

³⁸On the founding and European legacy of the Ursulines, see Sr. M. Monica, *Angela Merici and Her Teaching Idea, 1474-1540* (New York, 1927). Philip G. Caraman, *St. Angela: The Life of Angela Merici, Foundress of the Ursulines, 1474-1530* (London: Longmans, 1963). Also Teresa Ledochowska, *Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula according to the Historical Documents*, trans. Mary Teresa Neylan (Rome: Ancora, 1969).

³⁹Ruth Compton Brouwer, "Transcending the 'unacknowledged quarantine': Putting Religion into English-Canadian Women's History," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 3 (Fall 1992): 47-61.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 48.

“makes religious women the centre of the inquiry and studies their individual and collective histories, relating them to the broader issues of culture, women’s work, and family organization.”⁴¹

Though her untimely death halted her burgeoning research, Danylewycz had predicted that the 1980s and 90s would be a fertile time for research into the lives of women religious. Danylewycz was witness to an increased openness on the part of women religious in Quebec to participation in academic research. She observed that women religious were

beginning to speak out. Long regarded by themselves and society as outside the purview of sociological and historical inquiry, they are breaking the silence that has surrounded their lives. They welcome political, philosophical, and personal discussion and no longer shy away from the queries of journalists and reporters about life in the cloister.⁴²

Both Brouwer and Danylewycz predicted expansions in writing on the history of women religious that have not, as yet, been fully realized.

New perspectives which emerged in the late 1990s regarding the study of women and religion also underscored the need for further research on the history of women religious. Beyond the desire to see religion studied as an aspect of women’s history, Brouwer also argued for the need to examine the “personal, spiritual phenomenon” of women’s religious experience.⁴³ Other Canadian historians of religion in the early 1990s, such as McGowan, also despaired at the conservative direction of the field, noting that “institutional studies, while exploring many contours of religious life, can rarely capture a sense of religion among

⁴¹Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 16.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³Brouwer, “Transcending the ‘unacknowledged quarantine’,” 52.

common believers.”⁴⁴ While Canadian historian Lynne Mark’s *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth Century Small-Town Ontario* is successful in capturing such a sense of religion among common believers,⁴⁵ such an approach has not been fully considered in explorations of the lives of women religious.

In a similar vein to the approaches called for by Brouwer and McGowan, late-twentieth and twenty-first century American historians have pursued research in the area of what David D. Hall calls “lived religion.”⁴⁶ A key advocate of this shift in focus, and contributor to the field of American women and religion, historian Robert Orsi explains the methodology implicit in his understanding of ‘lived religion’. It involves

a redirection of religious scholarship away from the denominational focus that has so preoccupied scholars . . . toward a study of how particular people, in particular places and times, live in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in culture - *all* the idioms, including (often enough) those not explicitly their ‘own.’⁴⁷

‘Lived religion’ is not merely the social history of religion; rather, it includes spirituality as a dimension of religious experience and in so doing captures the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between individual and saint, institution and community, and officially

⁴⁴Mark McGowan, “Coming Out of the Cloister: Some Reflections on Developments of Religion in Canada, 1980-1990,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1-2, (Spring/Fall 1990): 180.

⁴⁵Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

⁴⁶David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴⁷Robert Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion,” in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, David D. Hall, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7. As an example of the application of such methods, also see Orsi, *Thank You St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

sanctioned ritual and personalized devotion. This perspective, I feel, is key to any meaningful study of women religious; for as much as women's religious communities are worthy of study for their societal contributions in the areas of education and healthcare and for their unique organizational structures and lifestyles, it is also imperative that historians consider the spiritualities intrinsic to these communities. Though not the only methodology through which lived religion might be examined, oral history offers a unique opportunity for discussions of spirituality.

While certain aspects of the histories of women religious, such as spirituality, remain relatively unexamined, in the late 1990s and in the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholars have begun to see the urgency of research in the area of women religious in English-speaking Canada, and the field has expanded appreciably. Several scholarly historical monographs on women's religious communities have been published, including Rosa Bruno-Jofre's *Vision and Mission: The Missionary Oblate Sisters*, James Cameron's *And Martha Served: History of the Sisters of St. Martha*, and Elizabeth Smyth and Linda Wicks's *Wisdom Raises Her Voice: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto Celebrate 150 Years*.⁴⁸ Further, some valuable theses and scholarly articles have been published which further illuminate the community histories of the St. Joseph Sisters of Toronto, the Loretto Sisters, the Sisters of St. Martha, the Sisters of Charity, and the Faithful Companions of Jesus.⁴⁹ Elizabeth Smyth's

⁴⁸Rosa Bruno-Jofre, *Vision and Mission: The Missionary Oblate Sisters* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); James Cameron, *And Martha Served: History of the Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish, Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2000); Elizabeth Smyth and Linda Wicks, editors, *Wisdom Raises Her Voice: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto Celebrate 150 Years* (Toronto: Transcontinental Press/Sisters of St. Joseph, 2001).

⁴⁹For works on the St. Joseph Sisters of Toronto, see Elizabeth Smyth, "The Lessons of Religion and Science: The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and St. Joseph's Academy, Toronto, 1854-1911" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1989), and "Developing the Powers of the Youthful Mind: The Evolution of

extensive work with teaching communities has produced some significant comparative studies.⁵⁰ Still, as many of the aforementioned scholars note, and as I have witnessed in my own work, the archives of women religious continue to be a rich yet seldom used resource for historians.

Certainly, the urgency of historical research on women religious is underscored by the

Education for Young Women at St. Joseph's Academy in Toronto, 1854-1911," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 60 (1993-1994): 103-125; also Mary Alban Bouchard, C.S.J., "Pioneers Forever: The Community of St. Joseph in Toronto and Their Ventures into Social Welfare and Health Care," in *Catholics at the Gathering Place: Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1841-1991*, Mark McGowan and Brian P. Clarke, eds. (Toronto: Canadian Catholic Historical Association and Dundrun Press, 1993), 105-118.

For histories of the Loretto Sisters see Barbara Cooper, "A Re-examination of the Early Years of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loretto Sisters) in Toronto," in *Catholics at the Gathering Place*, 89-104; also Marion Norman, "Making a Path by Walking: Loretto Pioneers Facing the Challenges of Catholic Education on the North American Frontier," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 65 (1999): 92-106.

On the Sisters of St. Martha, see Heidi MacDonald, "The Sisters of St. Martha and PEI Social Institutions, 1916-1982" (PhD thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2 vol., 2000); "Doing More With Less: The Sisters of St. Martha Diminish the Impact of the Great Depression *Acadiensis* XXXIII, 1, (Fall 2003): 21-46; and "The Social Origins and Congregational Identity of the Founding Sisters of St. Martha of Charlottetown, P.E.I., 1915-1925," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 70 (2004):29-47.

On the Sisters of Charity see Elizabeth W. McGahan, "The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception: A Canadian Case Study," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 61 (1995): 135-152; and Mary Olga McKenna, "Paradigm Shifts in a Women's Religious Institute: The Sisters of Charity of Halifax, 1950-1979," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 61 (1995): 135-152.

For a study of the Faithful Companions of Jesus see Sheila Ross, "Faithful Companions of Jesus in the Field of Education in Brandon, Manitoba, 1883-1895," *CCHA Historical Studies*, (2005): 79-93.

⁵⁰Elizabeth Smyth, "'Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries': Women Religious Recording and Writing History," in *Creating Historical Memory: English Canadian Women and the Work of History*. B. Boutilier and A. Prentice, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 101-128.; "Professionalization among the Professed: The Case of Roman Catholic Women Religious," in *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work*, ed. E. Smyth, S. Acker, P. Bourne, A. Prentice (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 234-254; and "The 'True Standing of Catholic Higher Education Institutions' of English Canada: the 1901 Flaconio Survey," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 66 (2000): 114-131.

advanced age of women religious themselves. Oral history is a valuable methodology for historians studying twentieth-century women's religious communities, yet there is a narrow window of opportunity through which we might collect first-person narratives. Further, as most Canadian communities have experienced a decline in new recruits in recent decades, the oral traditions of these communities will not survive unless documented in the near future.

Theoretical, Methodological and Experiential Considerations

The theoretic framework within which this historical study is conceived relies heavily on a feminist materialist orientation which places women at the centre rather than the periphery of study and which recognizes the primacy of their lived experience. A feminist materialist theoretical framework is, I believe, particularly key to the meaningful use of oral narratives, a methodology central to this study. Joan Sangster underscores the necessity that post-structuralist analysis of narratives be set within a feminist materialist context, noting "the dangers of emphasizing form over context, of stressing deconstruction of individual narratives over analysis of social patterns." I am strongly influenced by her cautionary statements:

We do not want to return to a history which either obscures power relationships or marginalizes women's voices. Without a firm grounding of oral narratives in their material and social context, and a probing analysis of the relation between the two, insights on narrative form and on representation may remain unconnected to any useful critique of oppression and inequality.⁵¹

As researchers, like myself, approach this largely uncharted area of Canadian women's history, it is important that we are sensitive to the ways in which a patriarchal Church history has perhaps distorted and/or limited the voices of women religious. A feminist materialist

⁵¹Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," in *Rethinking Canada*, 3rd edition, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita C. Feldman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 317.

orientation is essential to this study both as a corrective to past interpretations and as a means by which to ensure an authentic recounting and interpretation of the historical subjects' experiences.

While firmly committed to an authentic rendering of the sisters' lived experiences, this study is not restricted to a strictly chronological narrative. In this, the present work takes its cue from Judith Walkowitz, who describes her own *City of Dreadful Delight* as

observ[ing] many conventions of historical writing, particularly those of social history; yet it depart[s] from a traditional historical narrative to convey the dynamics of metropolitan life as a series of multiple and simultaneous cultural contests and exchanges.

Like Walkowitz's study of Victorian London, this examination of women's religious communities

does not emphasize change over time so much as it highlights a shifting pattern of cultural and social perspectives, set in dynamic relationship to each other, that offered a range of social constituencies different incitements to self-expression and self-creation in a modern . . . landscape.⁵²

The adoption of a methodological framework comprised as much from a linear narrative as from the analyses of constellations of ideas supports the notion that the experience of women religious is both materially grounded and discursively constructed.

Particularly in the third chapter of this work, which focuses on changing attitudes and ideas about women and 'womanhood', and the accompanying unprecedented experiences of women religious in the Vatican II era, a concerted effort is made to avoid a strictly essentialist view of 'experience'. Joan Scott's understanding of the place of experience in historical analysis rests on the following syllogism: "Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore,

⁵²Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 10.

separate the two.”⁵³ As such, the historian owes a responsibility to both the subject’s ‘enactment’ (or lived experience) of history and to the language which constitutes and constructs the subject’s experience. Scott advocates a poststructural reading of narratives that “change[s] the focus and the philosophy of our history, from one bent on naturalizing ‘experience’ through a belief in the unmediated relationship between words and things, to one that takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent.”⁵⁴ Mindful of Scott’s caveat, this thesis is an attempt to incorporate both a feminist materialist orientation and poststructural discourse analysis and, in so doing, to examine the story of religious life from new, varied and creative perspectives. As Scott argues in a recent essay, “feminist history thrives on interdisciplinary encounters.”⁵⁵ This insight supports an eclectic theoretical approach to writing the history of women religious.

A realignment and expansion of perspective is key to composing a history of those whose histories have often been undervalued or misrepresented by Church historians and hagiographers. Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez offers revealing insights as to the positioning of those variously disenfranchised within the Church:

Human history has been written by a white hand, a male hand, from the dominating social class. The perspective of the defeated in history is different. Attempts have been made to wipe from their minds the memories of their struggles. This is to deprive them of a source of energy, of an historical will to rebellion.⁵⁶

⁵³Ibid., 34.

⁵⁴Joan Scott, “Experience,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, J. Butler and J. W. Scott, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 36.

⁵⁵Joan W. Scott, “Feminism’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2004): 24.

⁵⁶Gustavo Gutierrez, “Where Hunger Is, God Is Not,” *The Witness* (April 1976): 6. Gutierrez’s work in the field of liberation theology, often criticized by the institutional Roman Catholic Church for its radicalism, is indicative of a post-

Gutierrez's claim that the erasure of memory is a tactic employed by the powerful in order to subordinate and control those without power is particularly relevant to understanding the situation of women religious within Roman Catholicism. Although, as Danylewycz has argued, the Church has empowered women by affording them alternatives to marriage and motherhood and by offering them opportunities for education and employment that would otherwise have been unattainable, because the balance of power in Roman Catholicism has long been held by an exclusively male hierarchy women's experiences have been mediated and limited by a male clergy, its dictates, and its interpretation of history. As such, an awareness of the prolonged disconnect between women religious and their own histories is essential to a feminist rendering of the story of religious communities and reform in the Vatican II.⁵⁷ Feminist philosopher Mary Daly uses the term "dismemberment" to describe the ways in which women have been deprived of and encouraged to forget their own histories by "patriarchal erasure of our tradition."⁵⁸ This dismemberment has served to subjugate women, relegating them to less powerful and less influential positions within social institutions. Additionally, in the case of women religious, it has also created an inaccurate perception of their histories among the general populace. Becoming cognizant of the dismemberment which has occurred in women's religious communities is crucial to the mindset of the twenty-first century historian. Charting the process from dismemberment to remembering, from dehistoricization to historicization, is the central responsibility around

conciliar consciousness about the subordinate role of people of colour, the poor and women within the Church.

⁵⁷The efforts of the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters to reacquaint themselves with their histories and with the original intentions of their foundresses will be explored in detail in Chapter One of this thesis.

⁵⁸Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: the metaethics of radical feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 23.

which this project is focussed.

Given the diverse yet complementary theoretical perspectives described in the previous paragraphs, the resulting conceptual framework of this thesis is itself an experiment in post-modern historical writing. Taking a cue from Paul A. Cohen's *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth*,⁵⁹ I attempt to examine the history of women religious studied in this work from three distinct perspectives. First, in Chapter One, a narrative Church history affords the reader a chronology of the 'official' view of reform in the years preceding and including the Second Vatican Council. Next, in Chapter Two, the experiences of the sisters, gleaned largely from their oral histories, are described and analysed, with the view to achieving a more 'internal' perspective on Vatican II-era renewal. Finally, in Chapters Three and Four, specific texts, and the sisters' relationships and responses to these texts, are explored via discourse analyses in which the subtle dynamics among women, spirituality, institutional religion and secular feminism are revealed. While the discourse analysis engaged in the latter half of this thesis does not purport to capture the 'mythological' according to the definition proposed by Cohen, it does probe the subconscious motivations for and reactions to change in ways that traditional historical narrative or oral histories cannot.

Both archival materials and oral histories form the basis for this history. While the

⁵⁹Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Cohen's book is divided into three parts and in each he constructs the history of the Boxer Rebellion using a distinct methodology: first, the 'event' is described using a traditional, chronological historical narrative; second, the 'experience' of the Boxers is probed by way of the personal writings and oral histories of participants who "conceptualized what was happening to them in ways that differed fundamentally from the retrospective, backward-reading constructions of historians"; and as myth, described as the "symbolic representations designed less to elucidate the . . . past than to draw energy from it." xiii

archival materials of the congregations aided in the construction of a chronology of reform-related events in the 1960s and 70s, it is the oral histories which provide the most significant insights into the sisters' reactions to and interpretations of these events. Sangster's discussion in "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of the Oral History" exposes the ways in which oral histories have been used by feminist scholars to 'push the boundaries' of traditional historical scholarship.

The topics potentially addressed through oral history; the possibilities of putting women's voices at the centre of history and highlighting gender as a category of analysis; and the prospect that women interviewed will shape the research agenda by articulating what is of importance to *them* - all offer challenges to the dominant ethos of the discipline.⁶⁰

Because the topic of women religious has been pursued so infrequently by Canadian historians - both those who identify as women's historians and those who identify as Church historians or historians of religion - the need for a feminist analysis of their narratives, one which places women at the centre of historical inquiry, is particularly salient.

The oral histories in this study, recorded between November 2001 and June 2005, document the reflections of more than two dozen women who have been members of the Ursuline and Holy Names communities for between thirty and seventy years, offering particularly keen insights into the experience of change in the period following the Second Vatican Council. These sisters who, at the time of the interviews, ranged in age from fifty-three to eighty-six, responded to invitations issued to the communities to participate in the oral history project. Because the women interviewed reflect the communities' wide ranges in ages and in life experiences, these women replied to questions regarding daily life, dress, decision-making, leadership models, and reactions to reform with diverse collections of memories. (For further information on the oral history collection and the questions used see

⁶⁰Sangster, "Telling Our Stories," 305.

Appendix 1.) Commonalities among the responses included the recognition of the rapidity of change, cognizance regarding their community's purposefulness and consciousness regarding change, and the increased participation of members during the period in processes of education and decision-making.

Generally speaking, the sisters who participated in the oral history collection for this research project were very forthcoming with their responses; many agreed to follow-up interviews, and several offered to personally introduce me to sisters whose stories and perspectives they knew to be different from their own. Although the participants in the oral history collection were self-selected, the 'snowball' effect of referrals, and even chance meetings, extended the group beyond the initial self-selected group. Many of the interviews are memorable because of the animated story-telling styles of the sisters and our shared laughter at their countless entertaining anecdotes. Also, as I had been forewarned in the reading of Sangster's work, the "expression, intonation, . . . metaphors, . . . silences and omissions"⁶¹ were often as revealing as the sisters' engaging stories. At times, sisters recalled difficult events or episodes from their early years in the convent; long pauses and watery eyes revealed mixed emotions as they recalled experiences from the distant past.

It is important to note that only women who remained with their respective communities throughout this period of reform and who are still with the communities today were interviewed. The oral histories, therefore, do not reflect the perspectives of women who left the communities during or following this period of reform; rather, they provide firsthand accounts of the experience of change *inside* women's religious communities. Resultantly, this work is much more than a history of institutional change. Because it offers a concentrated focus on the experiences of change in the lives of individuals it includes more

⁶¹Ibid., 308.

intimate, and sometimes elusive, topics such as interpersonal relationships and spirituality.

As a young historian, I felt particularly privileged to conduct these interviews, not only because of the narrow window of opportunity which exists to engage in oral history collection with these aging populations, but also because, from the outset of the project, I had a sense that I was treading on ‘hallowed ground’. This is not to say that the convents or the sisters themselves necessarily radiated holiness (although some convents and some sisters did have a remarkable tranquillity about them); rather, the intimacy of the questions, some of which the sisters had never before been asked, created unique moments of opportunity, and I was acutely aware that I was privileged to participate in these encounters.

A key consideration in approaching a feminist analysis of oral history narratives is the issue of interviewer-subject relationship. Any scholarly pretense of objectivity is moderated in this study by my adoption of feminist theorist Marcia Westcott’s notion of ‘intersubjectivity.’ Westcott argues that

historical truths are grasped not by attempting to eliminate subjectivity but through the intersubjectivity of meaning of subject and object. This intersubjectivity does not mean the identity of subject and object, but rather their dialectical relationship. Thus the questions that the investigator asks of the object of knowledge grow out of her own concerns and experiences.⁶²

Not only have I, as interviewer, structured the interview process, but my own experiences influence the shape of the questions and the interpretation of the narratives. Though previous to this study I had only passing acquaintance with a few of the sisters interviewed, I have crossed paths with the Holy Names and Ursuline communities over the years, as a young piano student at the Holy Names’ music school, and as a teacher at Ursuline College “The Pines” High School in Chatham. Though no longer run or staffed by Ursulines (the last

⁶²Marcia Westcott, “Feminist Criticism of the Social Sciences,” *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (November, 1979), 426.

Ursuline teacher retired in 1997), the school's historical ties to the community and close physical proximity to the Mother House have forged an ongoing relationship between the sisters and The Pines' staff and students. Further, raised in the Catholic faith, having attended Ontario separate schools in the 1970s and 80s, and having studied in the Religious Studies department at St. Jerome's University in the late 1980s, my own religious orientation is within a post-conciliar Roman Catholicism. These factors undoubtedly influence the shape and tone of this study and, mindful of the intersubjectivity between myself and the oral history subjects, I attempt to offer a historical analysis of the sisters' experiences that is both sensitive and scholarly.

The following chapters endeavour to shed light on how the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters, as members of Roman Catholic teaching communities in English-Canada, navigated the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council, how their respective communities negotiated reform in this era, and the ways in which these reforms affected women religious collectively and individually. Chapters One and Two assume a shared responsibility to relay the history of reform in the Vatican II era, but each does so from a particular perspective. Chapter One provides some historical background regarding women religious in Canada, including the establishment and growth of the two congregations who are the focus of this research, the Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. It then documents the ways by which the Roman Catholic Church's initiatives directed reform in women's religious communities from 1950 to 1965. Chapter Two records and compares the communities' respective experiences of change in the same period - the processes adopted, the directions forged, and the grassroots endeavours and new initiatives undertaken. Though the oral histories of the Holy Names and Ursuline sisters provide important examples and insights throughout the thesis, it is in this second chapter

that the voices of these women are truly brought to the fore in an effort to provide a glimpse into the inner workings of community in this period.

In Chapters Three and Four a more internal, inward-looking perspective is adopted, and the communities' more intimate psychological reactions and spiritual responses to change are examined. Chapter Three redirects the reader's view from the broad, lived experiences of the sisters, as offered in Chapter Two, to an examination of a discrete set of discourses which reveal the communities' anxieties and psychological dissonance around their often unconscious concerns regarding self-definition and self-image. A close discursive analysis will reveal the intersections between modern secular and traditional religious influences on women religious as they sought to rationalize a changing convent culture with the expectations of postwar North American society. Chapter Four analyses one particular aspect of convent culture which underwent significant change in the Vatican II years: spiritual reading. Reform to the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*, I believe, exerted particular influence on other aspects of reform and on sisters' shifting perceptions of community, spirituality, and self. In Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, the implications of reform are examined, including the longitudinal impact of Vatican II-era reform on women's religious communities. Additionally, I attempt to offer some concluding, if not conclusive, reflections on the overall conceptual, methodological and theoretical frameworks of this dissertation, and possible implications for future scholarship.

CHAPTER ONE

ECCLESIAL INITIATIVES REGARDING REFORM TO WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, 1950-1965

When asked to offer her general impressions of reform to women's religious communities in the Vatican II era, one Ursuline sister said, "The world was *invading*, if you like, the cloister. And it won, in some ways."¹ I might not have noticed Sister Frances's particular choice of words as she described the contact between secular and convent cultures in the latter half of the twentieth century were it not for the title of Jo Anne McNamara's two thousand-year history of women religious, *Sisters in Arms*. In the preface to this work, McNamara offers an extensive and intriguing rationale for her title, noting that military metaphors have long informed monastic rhetoric.

Ascesis (military training), self control, obedience, and self-sacrifice are the virtues of soldiers and they are most perfectly realized among the soldiers of Christ. Nuns were and are part of that army, even though they tend to be treated as irregulars in relation to the professional male clergy. Uniformed in veil and scapular, armed with prayer and good works, they have always been in the forefront of their religion's battles. . . . They shared too in the founder's vision of an apostolate to the poor, the sorrowing, the sick, the abandoned children of the earth. They gave their lives, whether in the violence of martyrdom or in the long sacrifice of mortification, for those dreams and those ambitions. Some were heroes and some were cowards. Volunteers led daring attacks on seemingly impregnable fortresses. Conscripts sometimes let resentment blight their lives or made their own corners comfortable by slacking off on the discipline. Tyrannical drill sergeants known to generations of children were balanced by generous quartermasters determined to feed the poor and heal the sick.

And, of course, the title *Sisters in Arms* evokes that comradeship which has always given the military life its luster of heroism and virtue. Our sisters have been united in a long war not only against the enemies of their religion but also against the misogynist elements within that religion that have mocked and constrained their efforts.²

¹Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author, 4 October 2004, Chatham, Ontario audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

²Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), ix-x.

Aligned with McNamara's usage, the rather militaristic language used by Sister Frances is fitting, in certain respects. Even in pluralist North America there has always existed a certain tension, a battle, if you will, between religious life and secular society. Today, most people's general knowledge about the history of women religious includes the notion that sisters' lives were atypical - they lived separately, dressed differently, socialized sparingly and prayed continually. Set apart from the world, women religious sought to combat the evils of earthly existence and they focussed their manual efforts and spiritual devotion on the glory of God. Their Herculean spiritual efforts were matched only by their tireless and often thankless work as teachers and nurses; and, as Brides of Christ, their spotless chastity was held up as the ideal for young Catholic women throughout the centuries. Almost any Roman Catholic over the age of fifty will attest to the fact that North American teaching sisters served as paragons of discipline, learnedness and piety, and many former students have mixed emotions of love and fear for these enigmatic 'superwomen'.

On the other hand, women religious have fought alongside their secular counterparts in the pursuit of social progress. True to their European legacy, sisters in the burgeoning New World worked as persistent crusaders in the establishment of social institutions. Countless schools, hospitals, orphanages, missions, monasteries and, more recently, women's crisis centres and shelters for street youth, owe their existence to the efforts of women religious. For more than four centuries, Roman Catholic sisters have taught, nursed and prayed for millions and millions of North Americans of all religions and creeds.

The first section of this chapter provides a concise history of the significance of women's religious life in past centuries, with particular emphasis on its establishment and spread in colonial North America. This includes brief histories of the Ursuline and Holy Names of Jesus and Mary communities on whose experiences this study is focussed. The

second section of the chapter offers an overview of the key initiatives in pre-conciliar reform, and examples of how these reforms were considered and implemented by the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters. Subsequently, the final third of the chapter examines conciliar reform efforts, their emphasis, tone and impacts on communities. An analysis of the effects of pre-conciliar and conciliar reforms on religious life will reveal that, although such ecclesial initiatives were exogenous in their origins, women religious seized opportunities for needed renewal of outmoded traditions and entered into a process of renewal which, with careful negotiation, resulted in meaningful and satisfying changes in communities' dress, patterns of daily living, devotional practices and self-definitions.

A Short History of Women and Religious Life

The North American experience is but a mere slice of an ancient and esteemed tradition of women in religious life, and it is important to recall that from the late third century to the present fascinating stories of such women weave their way through the history of Christianity. In fact, it is women religious who dominate the history of women in the Church and, as Mary Malone points out, “for almost seventeen hundred years, we hear practically nothing of the voices of married women.”³ It would seem that via religious life, with its glorification of virginity and emphasis on ascetic practices and mortification of the body, some women could fashion a place for themselves within a patriarchal, and often misogynous, institutional Church.

The growth of religious life for women was not necessarily constant throughout history; as the work of sociologist Patricia Wittberg demonstrates, “religious orders have undergone significant periods of growth and decline, often triggered by political or economic

³Mary T. Malone, *Women and Christianity: Volume I: The First Thousand Years* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2000), 133.

changes in secular society.”⁴ Yet, in spite of such fluctuations, the popularity and influence of these women throughout the Common Era is appreciable. Beginning in the fourth century and extending into the thirteenth century, along with their better-known male contemporaries such as Antony, Pachomius, Basil, Benedict, Augustine, and Francis, women such as Marcella, Paula, Macrina, Scholastica, Clare and their successors devoted themselves to the practice of asceticism, established monasteries which multiplied rapidly throughout Europe, and held positions of power and authority in these Christian communities. By the High Middle Ages the proliferation of convents in European cities was significant, and although it would be impossible to determine the exact numbers of women religious in the period, regional statistics reveal that a sizable proportion of women lived in religious communities. For example, in 1320 there were 54 houses of Beguines in Cologne, housing approximately 15 percent of the female population of the city.⁵

As will be examined in greater detail later in this thesis, as women were drawn in increasing numbers to religious life, and especially as they gained power, influence and coveted landholdings, the Church sought to impose restrictions on women’s religious communities. This would have significant bearing on the daily lives and mobility of women as papal enclosure, enveloping habits and episcopal governance stripped once powerful abbesses of their independence and authority. By the period of the Counter-Reformation all women religious were subject to Roman authority, and the impulse of women like Angela Merici to create non-cloistered, apostolic (or active) communities of women was quelled. Yet, despite Roman ascendancy, religious life remained a popular choice for women, and

⁴Patricia Wittberg, *The Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders: A Social Movement Perspective* (New York: The State University of New York Press, 1994), 40.

⁵Ibid., 35.

women religious increased in numbers throughout the Counter-Reformation era. Religious communities' subsequent decline in Western Europe, a consequence of the French Revolution, was followed by a momentous rise in membership in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Marie de l'Incarnation's arrival in New France in 1639 began an allegiance between women religious and the larger project of the colonization of North America. An Ursuline from Tours, Marie de l'Incarnation established schools for native girls in New France, counterparts to the Jesuits' schools for boys. The rapid growth of the Ursuline community and the arrival of sisters from other European communities ensured that as the North American colonies grew, women religious would serve natives and settlers, not only as teachers, but also as nurses and in other areas of social service.⁶

With the growth of Lower Canada, the Church, under the leadership of devout and influential nineteenth-century bishops such as Lartigue and Bourget, sought to establish firm control over all aspects of education, health and social welfare. Dominance over these institutions would serve not only to stifle the influences of Protestantism and secularism, but it would also ensure the propagation of ultramontane Catholicism. Already key service providers, women religious would play crucial roles in the proliferation of Church-run schools, hospitals, orphanages and other institutions in the nineteenth century.

According to Roberto Perin, 57 new women's religious communities emerged in

⁶In U.S. history, the women credited as the first to establish a religious community are Maryland-born Ann Matthews, along with her two nieces, and an Englishwoman, Frances Dickenson, all of whom came to Maryland in 1790 and established a convent at Port Tobacco after years as Discalced Carmelite nuns in Antwerp, Belgium. The first permanent convent in the present-day United States, however, was established in New Orleans in 1727 by Mother Marie Tranchepain and eight other Ursuline nuns from Paris. See George Stewart, *Marvels of Charity: History of American Sisters and Nuns* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), 50-51.

French-speaking Canada between 1837 and 1914. Of these, 29 originated in France, 2 in other European countries and 26 in Canada. Between 1837 and 1860 alone, 11 new communities were formed, including the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, a subject of this study, founded in Longueuil, near Montreal, in 1843. Between 1850 and 1920 the numbers of women religious increased significantly, from 650 to 13, 579, and the ratio of women religious to the total adult female population increased sevenfold.⁷

The increase of women religious outside Quebec in this period was also dramatic. Only 2 communities existed outside of Quebec in 1850, and these were affiliated with Quebec mother houses. By the end of the First World War their number had increased to 5,760 women religious belonging to 27 congregations. However, Perin notes that “since a considerable number of them were posted in the United States, it is difficult to tell how many worked in Canada outside Quebec.”⁸ Still, the increase in the number of convents in English-speaking Canada in this period is considerable, among them the Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union, established in 1860.

The communities which form the subjects of this history, the Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union and the Ontario Province of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary were the largest of the teaching congregations of women religious in the Diocese of London, Ontario from the late nineteenth through to the mid-twentieth century. Both communities began their service in Canada in the mid-nineteenth century and, collectively, from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century they taught in hundreds of elementary

⁷Roberto Perin, “French Speaking Canada from 1840,” in *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin, eds. (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1996), 212.

⁸Ibid., 212.

and secondary schools in the region, and at several colleges.

The Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union have their origins, as do all communities of Ursulines, in the person of Angela Merici. Born in Desenzano, Italy in the late-fifteenth century,⁹ Angela formed a group of women dedicated to the service of the poor, the sick and the needy. Officially established in 1535, the twenty-eight members of the Company of St. Ursula “took no vows and continued to live with their families; they would remain unmarried and were to carry on with the works of charity in which they were then involved.” Angela Merici had not set out to establish a traditional monastic community but a “new form of religious life for women, one that would enable them to work toward the elimination of the evils of their society in a way that nuns in the existing cloistered monasteries could never do.”¹⁰ It was only in the early seventeenth century, by which time the sisters numbered in the thousands and were spread across Italy and France, that the Ursulines were forced to comply with the Church decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which enforced the cloister. Trent’s authority demanded that “all religious women must conform to the strict laws of papal enclosure; as a consequence, canon law . . . forbade the existence of non-cloistered communities of women.”¹¹ Once an independent entity in service of the Church, the Ursulines were cloistered, were subject to Augustinian monastic Rule, were forced to adopt a severe clerical habit, and were placed under the jurisdiction of a bishop who acted as their ecclesiastical superior.¹²

⁹The exact date of Angela Merici’s birth is unknown. It is believed to be between 1470 and 1475. Angela was canonized in 1807.

¹⁰Margaret Pray, *Pilgrims in Service: The Chatham Ursulines, Volume 1 - 1860-1896* (Chatham: Chamberlain Press, 1991), 2.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 3.

¹²*Ibid.*

The Chatham Ursulines were established by Mother Mary Xavier (Yvonne Le Bihan) in 1860. Mother Mary Xavier, who had entered the Ursulines in France in 1835,¹³ had a strong devotion to the Ursuline mystic and missionary, Marie de l'Incarnation. In 1855, in fulfilment of her dream to become a missionary herself, Mother Mary Xavier came to North America in order to establish a school in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.¹⁴ Five years after opening the Ursuline Academy at Sault Ste. Marie, Mother Mary Xavier was persuaded by Reverend J. V. Jaffre, S.J., to come to Chatham to establish an academy for girls. A suitable convent and school were made available, and Mother Xavier and a sister who had accompanied her began to teach in Chatham.¹⁵ Over the years, the populations of both the order and of the school grew. In accordance with the Rule of the Paris congregation, the Chatham Ursulines were an independently governed entity, establishing their first Constitution in 1915. By 1935 there were three hundred thirty-five sisters in the Chatham congregation, with convents in Chatham, Windsor, London, Sarnia and many small towns in the surrounding areas.¹⁶ The sisters staffed numerous elementary schools for both girls and boys, as well as founding Glengarda Academy in Windsor, and Ursuline College High School (known as "The Pines") in Chatham, on whose grounds the order's large Mother House (also referred to as "The Pines") was also built. The community's women's college,

¹³Note that this was a period of rebuilding for religious communities in post-revolutionary France. Out of economic necessity, the French Ursulines, unlike their Italian and French predecessors, often taught the daughters of the middle-class and elite rather than engaging in charitable or missionary works.

¹⁴M. Pray, *Pilgrims in Service*, Vol. 1, 26.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 36-42.

¹⁶Margaret Pray, *Pilgrims in Service, Volume 2, 1896 - 1984* (Chatham: Chamberlain Press, 2001), 42. The significant rise in membership experienced by the Ursulines in this period is consistent with membership trends in other orders in Canada.

founded in 1919 as Ursuline College and known since 1963 as Brescia College, is an affiliate of the University of Western Ontario.¹⁷ (See Appendix 2 for photographs.) As a result of mergers with smaller Ursuline communities, the Chatham Ursulines extended their reach outside the province of Ontario to such locales as Calgary, Alberta, and Vibank, Saskatchewan. Four Chatham Ursulines established a mission and school in Chicaylo, Peru, in 1962. Ursuline missions have served Native Canadian communities in Northern Ontario and Quebec. Throughout these years of growth and development, the sisters maintained the structured lifestyle, dress, customs and daily horarium prescribed by Augustinian Rule.

The population of the Chatham Ursulines peaked in the early Vatican II years at 479 members.¹⁸ Once strictly a teaching order, the community diversified in the 1960s and 70s, and many members served as social workers and in pastoral ministry. In the post-Vatican II era, the population of the community has declined due to lack of new recruits, and also as a result of attrition from both defections and deaths, and at present there are 129 Chatham Ursulines, many of whom are active, and about 15% of whom are infirm. Today, the average age of the sisters is approximately 75 years.¹⁹ Their large Mother House in Chatham is still operational, though a smaller, more suitable house is under construction and the Ursulines plan to move to their new convent in the autumn of 2006.²⁰

¹⁷For a history of Brescia College from its founding to 1980, see Patricia G. Skidmore, *Brescia College, 1919-1979* (London, Ontario: Brescia College, 1980).

¹⁸*Ibid*, 74.

¹⁹Current demographics provided by Sister Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U. Archivist, in conversation, June 2005.

²⁰The Chatham Motherhouse, known as “The Pines” has been for sale since 2004. A recent article in the *Chatham Daily News* (May 5, 2005), describes the new convent’s location and unique architectural design. The sisters see their conscious choice of an environmentally-friendly design as part of their on-going commitment to education and to the earth. The official ground-breaking for the new facility took

The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary of the Ontario Province share similarities with the Chatham Ursulines. They, too, have a long history of teaching in the Diocese of London, Ontario. Like the Chatham Ursulines, the Holy Names were established in the midst of nineteenth-century ultramontane resurgence in Catholicism. The Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary was founded in 1843 at Longueuil, Quebec, by French Canadian Mother Marie Rose (Eulalie Durocher), a woman of great faith and dedication to education.²¹ Mother Marie Rose's primary concern was the education of girls, and this informed the apostolate of the community.

The history of the Ontario Province begins in 1864 when the first Holy Names sisters arrived in Windsor, where they established St. Mary's Academy, a boarding and day school for girls. (See Appendix 3 for photograph.) Throughout the last century they have taught in numerous elementary and secondary schools in Windsor, Essex County, and Detroit, Michigan, and at Holy Redeemer College and Assumption University in Windsor. In addition, they ran a successful music academy.²² They have a rich legacy in their local communities as distinguished educators and artists, and have existed as a distinct Province of the larger congregation since 1894.

By the early twentieth century, the once small Quebec community had a large Mother House in Outremont, home to the General Administration and Mother House of the congregation, and convents across North America. Between the late-nineteenth and mid-

place on May 9, 2005.

²¹Mother Marie Rose was beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 23, 1982, and her remains now rest at the Cocathedral of Saint-Antoine-de-Padoue, Longueuil, Quebec.

²²The author of this thesis admits that she was one of the academy's least successful piano students, from 1978 to 1982.

twentieth century, distinct geographic regions came to be organized into the 'Provinces' of Washington, New York, Quebec, California, Manitoba, Oregon, Lesotho, and Ontario.²³ The congregation also has a Mission Sector with missions in Brazil, Haiti, Peru, and Newfoundland. The Ontario Province encompasses convents in Windsor and the surrounding area, Michigan, and Mississippi. Though the General Council, the supreme governing body of the bilingual congregation, has been based in Quebec since its founding, elected Provincial Councils were established in the early 1970s to attend to local needs.

Like the Chatham Ursulines, the Holy Names Sisters have seen a decline in membership since mid-century. The congregation's total population peaked during the Vatican II years at 4205. The population of the Ontario Province of the Holy Names was at its highest - just shy of 200 members - in the same period.²⁴ Today, the total number of Holy Names Sisters world-wide is 1385, and the Ontario Province accounts for 42 of these members.²⁵ In this first decade of the twenty-first century, the Holy Names Sisters of the Ontario Province remain actively involved in education and the arts, as were their predecessors, but they also work in social service, pastoral ministry, prison ministry, spiritual direction, healing touch (massage) therapy, counselling, and elder care. Throughout the course of this project, the Ontario province has been involved in a restructuring process wherein the provinces of Ontario, Washington, Oregon, California, and New York have

²³Though the Superior General and the general administration is based in at the Motherhouse in Quebec, representatives from each Province attend General Chapters.

²⁴"S.N.J.M Population," summary chart of SNJM population statistics, 1850-1979, 1980. S.N.J.M Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

²⁵Current demographics for the S.N.J.M. congregation accessed at their website, <http://www.snjm.org/EnglishContent/historyeng.htm>; Provincial website also available at <http://www.mnsi.net/~snjmont/index.htm>, accessed 15 June 2005. Statistics confirmed in conversation with Sr. Suzanne Mallette, S.N.J.M. archivist, June 2005.

amalgamated as the U.S.-Ontario Province, as of January 2006. As their populations have declined due to deaths of members, and as more sisters have become infirm, centralized administration of these regions has replaced the separate provincial administrative structures. This has not involved a redistribution of members outside their original provincial regions.

Clearly, both the Holy Names and Ursuline community have entered into a period of decline in recent decades, and this is typical of most Canadian religious communities. Still, it is important to remember that throughout history, even through periods of greater and lesser popularity, responding to a vocation to the religious life remained a desired option for some women. Whether as an alternative to marriage, an escape from traditional family life, a means by which to become educated or a response to a call from God, women over the centuries have taken vows committing themselves to life in religious communities.

The most common of the vows taken by women religious are those of poverty, chastity and obedience, and these have long defined religious life. Conventionally, the vow of poverty is a commitment to an austere, communal lifestyle; the vow of chastity involves the renunciation of marriage and commitment to the celibate life; and the vow of obedience involves adherence to the Rule and governance of the community. These three vows are sometimes accompanied by additional vows specific to communities, such as ‘stability’, ‘the service of the poor’ or ‘the instruction of girls’. Depending on the community, vows may be temporary or permanent. Usually, it is only following a designated number of years of ‘formation’ (a period of education and discernment, typically involving an initial postulancy of six months to one year, followed by a period of a few years in the novitiate) that a woman will profess her final vows, committing herself to her chosen vocation in community. While the vows of communities remain constant, the interpretation of the meaning of these vows change over time.

Related to the vows professed by a community's members, the 'charism' of a religious community are the spiritual gifts given by God to individuals or groups for the good of the community. Bestowed on the foundress of a community and passed on from generation to generation, charisms are sometimes updated or refocused as the community grows and evolves and as their role in the world changes. From the time of their inception, the congregations in this study have held teaching as their central charism, while other communities espouse such responsibilities as the care of the sick, or the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, or the care of unwed mothers as their respective charisms. The 'apostolate' of a community is the living out of a congregation's charism.

Apostolic congregations, that is, women's religious communities who play an *active* role in the world - usually as teachers, or nurses, or in some aspect of social service - increased in popularity in the modern era. While true monastic communities continue to exist, many of them devoted exclusively to lives of contemplation and prayer, most religious communities established in the past few centuries have been apostolic in their focus, taking on more worldly occupations, like teaching. Of course, until recent decades, monastic traditions and conventions, like the cloister and habit, continued to be enforced, even in these apostolic, or active, communities. Women in apostolic communities, however, did not practice strict enclosure: their Rules and Constitutions permitted limited contact with secular society in order that the sisters might do their work in the world.

Soldiering on as teachers, nurses and social workers, by the post-World War II years many North American women religious held managerial and professional posts in schools and hospitals, yet in so many ways their lives were radically different from their secular colleagues. The lifestyle, daily routines, governance and dress of women religious remained quite similar to those of their sixteenth-century counterparts and, as such, traditional convent

life was not amenable to rapidly changing North American culture of the mid-twentieth century. Further, women religious, despite their education and status in their places of work, and despite the respect afforded them by the laity, held a position of ambiguity within the Church. Neither clergy nor laity, they drifted in a state of institutional and social limbo. In order that religious life might find meaning and relevance for the twentieth century, significant reform would be required.

Among the most salient influences on women's religious communities' impetus to reform in the latter half of the twentieth century were the official directives of the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) ushered in what were, arguably, the most significant ecclesial reforms and ecumenical initiatives in centuries, and women religious were profoundly affected by these changes, both at the communal and individual levels. At first consideration, it would seem that the reforms which were implemented in women's religious communities in the 1960s stemmed directly and exclusively from the broader ecclesial reforms of the Roman Catholic Church in the same decade. Observers from outside the Catholic tradition would have noticed that outward changes implemented by women religious beginning in the mid-1960s - such as the adoption of secular clothing and expansion into less traditional fields of employment - coincided with the proclamations of the Second Vatican Council and its recommendations for sweeping reforms of the two thousand-year-old institutional Church. Similarly, the 'view from the pews' supported this popular observation. The Catholic laity of the post-Vatican II era would certainly have noted that the dress, deportment, lifestyles and occupations of the 'good sisters' who had taught them, their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on, had undergone significant changes in the decade following the Council.

Certainly, the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council had substantive bearing on the

realisation and implementation of reforms within religious communities. Yet the Church and the communities themselves had entered into the initial stages of reform more than a decade earlier. Consequently, a study of the changes which occurred in women's religious communities in the Vatican II era must begin in the 1950s.

These years of 'pre-conciliar' reform, dating from 1950, have been well documented. Theologians and historians alike have noted the significance of papal encyclicals and pronouncements of the period on the formation of the national organizations of Superiors, and on the development of formation programs for young women in the modern novitiate.²⁶ Although appreciable lifestyle and theological changes would not occur until the Vatican II years, over a decade later, it was under the leadership of Pius XII (1939-1958) that the Roman Catholic Church of the post-war years began to enter into discussion of adaptations to the age-old traditions of religious life.

Pope Pius XII and Pre-Conciliar Reform, 1950 to 1958

Convent life for women religious in the 1950s was, in many respects, not unlike the life experienced by their predecessors in previous centuries. Most communities followed the Rules, or sacred guidelines, of the ancient monastics which dated from the fifth and sixth centuries.²⁷ It was around these Rules that the governing Constitutions of religious

²⁶For a comprehensive collection of papal initiatives, including sermons, letters and encyclicals, from this period, see *The States of Perfection* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1967). Most significant commentary in this area is found in Elizabeth Kolmer, *Religious Women in the United States: A Survey of the Influential Literature from 1950 to 1983* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984). For a history of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious of the USA, see Lora Ann Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). For the history of the American Sister Formation Conference, see Marjorie Noterman Beane, *From Framework to Freedom* (New York: University Press of America, 1993).

²⁷The Holy Names and Ursuline sisters follow the Rule of St. Augustine, dating from the early fifth century.

communities had been formed, and together these writings provided stringent guidelines regarding prayer and worship, work, enclosure, governance, dress, deportment, daily routines, dining and diet, spiritual reading, silence, recreation and rest.

In the pre-Vatican II years the governance of women's religious congregations, as entrenched in their Constitutions, followed a well defined, top-down model whereby a Superior General, elected by the fully-professed members of the community, held responsibility for the day to day administration, regulation, and corporal and spiritual discipline of the community. An elected Council served as an advisory body to the Superior General. General Chapters, typically convened every four to six years, provided a process by which the community would discuss and decide on issues of pertinence to the community. Chapters were attended by delegates elected from among the fully professed members of the community, and only these sisters were entitled to vote on decisions made at Chapters. The electoral procedures for the selection of the Council and representatives to Chapters aside, the Superior General's position was essentially autocratic. Sisters were expected to defer to her decisions on all matters, from teaching assignments to penances meted out for minor offences.

For centuries these autocratically governed and thoroughly regulated communities comprised a culture of religious life which served to provide the Church and the world with a dedicated and stable workforce of teachers, nurses, social service workers and contemplatives; and, as Danylewicz and others have argued, the convent provided these women with "an alternative" to marriage and spinsterhood. Joan Chittister, in her appraisal of religious life in the second half of the twentieth century, describes religious life in the 1950s as "reflective, regular, focused, clear and effective." It afforded women opportunities for reflection, both spiritual and scholarly; it offered regularity and stability through its well-

established routines and rituals; it was focused on specific tasks which provided nourishment for others and sustenance for the community; it offered clarity of theological purpose; and its adherents provided effective educational and social services for millions of people worldwide. In sum, notes Chittister, religious life offered women “both a noble purpose and a spiritual reward.”²⁸ Why, one might ask, was there a need for reform in the mid-twentieth century?

Over the previous hundred years, the Church had witnessed unprecedented social change, stemming in no small part from factors such as rapid urbanization, massive technological and industrial advances, and the physical and emotional challenges of two world wars. In many respects, the lives of the laity had undergone appreciable change, while the lifestyles of clergy and religious had remained the same, bound by tradition and canonical legislation. By the mid-twentieth century a vocations crisis in Europe,²⁹ which no doubt caused concern for the future viability of communities on other continents, led the Vatican to consider the need for religious communities to adapt to changing times. Could medieval customs sustain themselves in a rapidly changing global context? Were centuries-old customs of dress and lifestyle practical in the modern world? Did religious communities and their individual members provide the best service possible to the people to whom they ministered in the twentieth century?

²⁸Joan Chittister, *The Way We Were* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005), 22.

²⁹Pius XII addresses the vocations crisis in women’s religious communities directly in “‘Nuns in the Modern World’: Allocution to the Superiors General of Orders and Congregations of Women, September 15, 1952” in *The States of Perfection*, p. 426. He notes that “the crisis has not yet reached every country,” but he cautions that “in a number of European countries it is already a cause for worry. In an area where twenty years ago religious life for women was enjoying a fine flowering, the number of vocations has dropped to one half.”

In the 1950s, Pope Pius XII³⁰ drew marked attention to the state of religious life in the modern world. As Elizabeth Kolmer notes, “Almost no year passed in the decade of the fifties without a new directive from the Pontiff for institutes of religious.”³¹ Via both encyclicals and orations, Pius XII, along with his Sacred Congregation for Religious,³² raised key issues regarding reform in religious communities by issuing numerous statements, both written and oral, regarding women religious in the 1950s. The initial encyclical, *Sponsa Christi*, and the dozens of speeches and statements which followed and which have been compiled in the substantive volume *The States of Perfection*, are representative of Pius XII’s vision of and direction for women’s religious communities. Women religious around the globe knew, well in advance of the 1960s, that change was in the air.

The 1950 encyclical *Sponsa Christi*, or ‘*Brides of Christ*’, issued by Pius XII, began the decade’s focus on the issue of women religious and reform. *Sponsa Christi* is an essentially conservative document articulating the Church’s position regarding the ‘papal

³⁰Pius XII served as Roman Pontiff from 1939-1958. Scholarly assessments of Pope Pius XII’s legacy are mixed. Some biographers, such as Francis Sugrue, praise his erudition and eloquence, recognize his courage for remaining in Rome throughout World War II, and honour him for his infallible dogmatic proclamation regarding the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Sugrue notes that Pius XII “insisted the Church could become modern without compromising its doctrine.” Francis Sugrue, *Popes in the Modern World* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1961), 257. Others, like theologian Hans Kung, are highly critical of Pius XII’s leadership. Kung refers to Pius XII as “the last unassailed representative of the medieval Counter-Reformation antimodernist paradigm.” According to Kung, “his actions were fixated on the curia and the institution instead of pastorally on men and women . . . [and] his attitude had been deeply authoritarian and antidemocratic.” Kung is particularly condemnatory of Pius XII’s silence regarding the Holocaust. Hans Kung, *The Catholic Church: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 176-177.

³¹Kolmer, *Religious Women in the United States*, 21.

³²The Sacred Congregation for Religious is but one of several Sacred Congregations of the Roman Catholic Church. Sacred Congregations, formed by the Pope and comprised of members of the curia, are the highest ranking bodies serving and advising the papacy.

enclosure' of religious communities - that is, the rules and regulations which ensured that women religious maintain a 'cloister', or a physical separateness from the world, in their daily living. This practice of papal enclosure, which guaranteed nuns' physical safety, provided an environment conducive to prayer and, of course, safe-guarded their chastity, had been officially enforced since the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century. Yet the post-war anxiety and Cold War conservatism of the 1950s had "reinforced the church's siege mentality," and encouraged a reiteration of the importance of external controls like enclosure in preserving the integrity of traditional religious life.³³

At the same time, and somewhat ironically, *Sponsa Christi* identified a need for women religious to adapt to the modern world. The use of the term 'adaptation' is particularly significant in an appraisal of 1950s' directives to women's religious communities. Pope Pius explicitly advocates adaptation as a strategy of reform: "We have decided to make with caution and prudence certain adaptations to present times, which may not do honor to the venerable institution but at the same time enlarge its effectiveness."³⁴ These 'adaptations', mainly to aspects of lifestyle, were not initiated with a view to making changes to the Church itself, nor were they to change the historical understandings of religious life; rather, they were undertaken as ways by which religious communities might make needed adjustments in order to better function in the modern world.

As an example of the sorts of adaptations that might be required of women's religious communities, Pope Pius notes that "there are not a few Monasteries which, alas, are on the verge of exstinction [sic] from hunger, misery and want; there are many which . . . are

³³McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 614.

³⁴*Sponsa Christi*, 25 - 26.

leading a hard and intolerable life.”³⁵ Given that many religious communities had been founded in the early Middle Ages and had experienced little change to their austere, ascetic lifestyles since the time of their inception, it is no surprise that their living conditions were incongruous with the expectations of the mid-twentieth century. For example, though many sisters taught in modern schools, their traditional religious lifestyle, dress, and customs, and their understanding of popular culture, politics and social mores were egregiously out of step with those of their lay colleagues and pupils.

Pope Pius’s observation regarding the ‘hard and intolerable’ nature of religious life is confirmed by women of the Ursuline and Holy Names communities. Many of the sisters interviewed commented on the rigid routines of their respective communities in the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s, noting how physically and emotionally demanding their lives were in the pre-Vatican II period. Though they did not suffer from physical hunger, many described the harsh conditions of the convent in the 1940s and 50s. For example, this is evidenced in the story told by one Ursuline about a conversation with her biological sister, also an Ursuline:

My sister was just here visiting - she’s also a sister in the community, she lives in Strathroy - and I said, “I’m going for an interview.” And I asked her, “What would you say about the changes in the Church?” And she said, “If they hadn’t come, I wouldn’t be here, I’d be dead. I could never have lived on. I wouldn’t have had the courage or the strength or the health to live on the way we were living. . . . I wouldn’t be here today if it hadn’t been for the changes.” And I thought, yeah, that’s kind of right - we probably would be alive, but life was really hard, *really* hard.³⁶

One Holy Names sister, in describing the numerous regulations to which the sisters were subject, noted that these detracted from the higher values of fellowship and compassion:

³⁵Ibid., 26.

³⁶Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario. Dominica and her biological sister, Angelica, entered the Ursuline community in 1934 and 1941, respectively.

Some of the rules didn't help us to be friendlier toward each other and compassionate with each other. . . . But that just all went by the wayside after Vatican II, so that people could be *human* instead of - I don't know what you were supposed to be before that, but it certainly wasn't human.³⁷

Though the solutions to the conflict between traditional religious life and adaptation to the modern world posited in *Sponsa Christi* are general, rather than specific to particular situations, the following admonition is offered:

there are some elements in the institution of Nuns which are neither necessary nor complementary, but merely external and historical, since they certainly owe their existence to the circumstances of former times which are now very much changed.³⁸

Sponsa Christi's suggestion that communities ought to delineate between the aspects of religious life which are 'necessary and complementary' and those that are 'extrinsic and historical', foreshadowed the following decade's concern with the adaptation of religious life to the modern world.

Sponsa Christi's 1950 release coincided with a general assembly of religious, the First General Congress of the States of Perfection, for which Superiors representing monastic and contemplative religious orders were beckoned to Rome. The next year, Pius XII held another general assembly, this time for the Superiors of teaching communities. His recommendations to Superior Generals of teaching communities were substantive, and included three particularly significant areas where adaptations were required: reconsideration of traditional religious habits; modifications of communities' horaria (daily schedules); and proposals for increased training and education for teaching sisters.

Pre-conciliar Reform and the Religious Habit

³⁷Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 22 November 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

³⁸*Sponsa Christi*, 25.

With regard to the religious habit, Pius XII implored Superiors to “choose one which will be the expression of interior unaffectedness, of simplicity, of religious modesty; then it will serve to edify all, even modern youth.”³⁹ It is important to note that this is a very general directive which does not offer specific guidelines for modifications to traditional dress. Even if Pius XII had wanted to make particular recommendations, the wide range of styles and purposes served by the religious habits of thousands of communities around the world would have made specific suggestions near to impossible.⁴⁰ Neither does Pope Pius’s statement indicate that secular clothing was to be considered an option or alternative to the religious habit. The call for ‘unaffectedness,’ ‘simplicity’ and ‘modesty’ in religious garb and the prediction that these qualities will appeal to ‘modern’ youth seems to indicate a lack of understanding of Western youth culture of the 1950s. It does, however, point to a desire to forge connections between teaching sisters and the students in their charge. A bit more specificity was offered in 1952, when Pius XII reiterated his desire for Superiors to consider the suitability of their communities’ habits, noting that “the religious habit must always express consecration to Christ” and that it ought also to “be suitable and in keeping with the requirements of hygiene.”⁴¹

In her history of the clothing of women religious, *The Habit*, Elizabeth Kuhns titles the chapter on 1950s and ’60s reforms to religious habits “Explosion,” a fitting title for a discussion of what would have been a time of significant change, especially for women who

³⁹“‘Religious Life and Teaching’: Allocution to teaching Sisters, September 13, 1951,” in *The States of Perfection*, 413.

⁴⁰For an extensive historical examination of the habits of women religious, their development and significance, see Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

⁴¹“‘Nuns in the Modern World’: Allocution to the Superiors General of Orders and Congregations of Women, September 15, 1952,” in *The States of Perfection*, 413.

had worn their congregations' traditional habits for many years. Kuhns notes that there were two distinct attitudes regarding the habit in the years of pre-conciliar reform. First, many sisters viewed the habit as "antiquated clothing that . . . symbolized remoteness from the very society they strove to serve,"⁴² and they saw reform as not only needed, but long overdue. A second attitude, in direct opposition to the first, was one of reluctance wherein many women religious were reluctant to institute even minor modifications to traditional dress. Kuhn notes that "since many nuns felt that it was scandalous to remove the habit even for swimming or convent plays and pageants, the idea of altering its design was truly abhorrent."⁴³ According to Kuhn, "some [communities] found the Vatican's interest in their clothing nothing short of meddling."⁴⁴

Those Ursuline and Holy Names sisters who recalled wearing the traditional habits of their communities in the 1930s, '40s and '50s seem to concur with the first attitude Kuhn describes; that is, that the habit was antiquated and was often obtrusive in their daily lives and work. One Ursuline noted with some sarcasm, "We had that *gorgeous, romantic* sixteenth-century habit. It looked *so* pretty on paper; it looked *gorgeous* in pictures. It was *very hot* in the summer and *cold* in the winter!"⁴⁵ Another recalled that, as a university student, she had difficulty wearing the habit in the science labs:

When I went to Western in chemistry I went in the old habit, which meant I had long sleeves, the habit reached to the ground, I had this thing called a 'guimpe' in the front which was *really flammable*, I had all these veils and drapes and everything. . . . By second year I had to do something or they just

⁴²Kuhns, *The Habit*, 139.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁵Eleanor Gleason, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

weren't going to let me in the labs - I was a fire hazard!⁴⁶

A Holy Names sister who had worn the habit for more than a decade before reform was even discussed, recalled her changing attitudes toward the habit:

I loved the habit. I thought certain things would never change - I thought the habit would go on forever. . . . But to tell you the truth, now that I look back, our habit was serge and around the waist we had beautiful box pleats, but washing and ironing it and wearing it! - - It was *so hot* in the summertime because we had three or four yards of serge around our middles!⁴⁷

In the 1950s, the leadership of the Ursuline and the Holy Names communities entered into official discussions of adaptations, particularly to aspects of the habit which were less than hygienic or comfortable. At first glance, there are many similarities between the traditional habits of the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters and, consequently, similar concerns were addressed at their respective Chapters. Both communities' habits were made from black serge, and both were composed of headdresses which included white undercaps which framed the face, and black veils. Both had full, floor-length dresses with long sleeves, belted at the waist with a cincture from which hung rosary beads. A slightly shorter black underskirt (or petticoat) and shirt were worn under the habit. Uniformed cloaks, undergarments, and nightclothes were also prescribed. In order to ensure uniformity, both communities' regulations insisted on strict adherence to patterns and models, housed in the communities' respective archives.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Anne Denomy, O.S.U., interview by author, 26 October 2004, Stratford, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario. By the second year of her Chemistry program, the Ursuline community had developed their first modified habits, and Sister Anne wore a smaller veil and simpler black dress which conformed to safety standards of the science labs.

⁴⁷Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 3 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

⁴⁸*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union*, chapter X, article 1, p. 70, Ursuline Convent "The Pines", Chatham, Ontario, 1952, Ursuline

Upon closer examination, however, differences between the two congregations' habits are evident. The Ursuline habit fell to about two inches from the ground, while the Holy Names habit, until 1950s' modifications, touched the floor in the back and cleared the floor by one half inch in the front. The Ursuline habit's width at the bottom hem was prescribed as 3½ yards for those of medium size, varying from 4 yards for the largest and 3 yards for the smallest sizes, and the upper part of the dress had two pleats at the front on each side of centre. The Holy Names habit was slightly fuller, using between four and five yards of material across the bottom of the skirt, with four pleats in the front of the dress and six in the back. Though generally similar, with its slightly longer and fuller design the Holy Names sisters' habit would have been somewhat heavier and more cumbersome than that of the Ursulines. (See Appendix 4 for photographs of the communities' traditional habits.)

The most distinctive part of any religious costume is the head-dress, and here key distinctions are obvious. According to their 1952 Constitutions, the Ursuline head-dress consisted of "cap, bandeau, guimpe, domino and veil." The cap was designed to completely cover the hair; the bandeau, a folded and starched white linen square of approximately three inches wide, was worn across the forehead just above the brow line; the guimpe, also of starched white linen, was between 8 and 11 inches deep and formed a stiff, flat collar worn over the neck and dress; the domino and veil were measured to extend to just below the waist, and the veil was folded and pinned to the domino.⁴⁹

The Holy Names head-dress was slightly longer than that of the Ursulines, and

Archives, Chatham Ontario; *Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, article 249, p. 33, Mother House, Outremont, 1962, S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

⁴⁹*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union*, 1952, chapter X, articles 11-17, p. 73-74.

slightly simpler in design. It, too, was comprised of a white bandeau and black veil, and its distinctiveness was in the white coif which enclosed the face. Offering a vivid description of the coif, one Holy Names sister referred to it as “horse blinkers.”⁵⁰

Though significant changes to their habits were not initiated until the mid to late-1960s, it would seem that both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities were attuned to the Church’s 1950s’ discourse regarding religious garb. The Ursuline community began discussing the issue of reform to the habit at their 1957 Chapter. Minutes from this Chapter record discussion as to whether the habit deterred girls from entering the community by being too “top-heavy, unbalanced, or clumsy.” Though decisions were not made to reform the habit, sisters at the 1957 Chapter viewed some photographs of ‘simplified habits’, that is, habits with shorter skirts and smaller veils.⁵¹ They also discussed points of consideration for future changes to the habit, including its modesty and “expression of consecration to Christ,” ease of creation and repair, ease of assembly, cleaning requirements, comfort, and suitability to work and living conditions.⁵²

Similarly, in the same period the Holy Names congregation addressed the issue of adaptations to the traditional habit, citing Pius XII’s admonitions directly regarding aspects of modernization and hygiene.⁵³ Numerous modifications to the traditional habit, some of

⁵⁰Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

⁵¹*Minutes of the 1957 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario.* Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario. Included in this file is small envelope of photos labelled “Pictures of Simplified Habits, taken in St. Louis, 1955.” These include habits with knee-length skirts and smaller veils.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Acts and Recommendations of the 1961 General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, 1962, p. 24. S.N.J.M. Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

them quite minuscule, were made in 1956, including a reduction in the number of pleats in the front of the skirt and a shortening of the skirt to three inches from the floor in order to lessen the weight of the dress; an optional detachable skirt, with the benefit that it might be washed “more easily and more frequently”; a reduction in the width of the coif to three inches;⁵⁴ the use of a “lighter” black material for the dress; the use of “synthetic material” for the bandeaux and collar; and that the “underclothes and nightgowns” might be made from “light weight cotton.”⁵⁵ As many of these modifications served to lighten the habit and make it easier to clean, it seems that the Holy Names sisters were most concerned with the hygienic aspects of the Vatican recommendations for reform to the habit. As their habit was made from a bit more fabric and had a headpiece that obscured their vision to a greater degree than that of the Ursulines, the Holy Names’ modifications brought their habit closer in dimensions and weight to that of the traditional Ursuline design, though there is no evidence that this was intentional.

In the discussions and revisions of both communities, hygiene and ease of wearing seem to be key concerns in the pre-conciliar era. Slight modifications, including use of synthetic materials and some detachable (and therefore more easily laundered) parts, seem appropriate responses to Pius XI’s suggested adaptations regarding “simplicity” and “religious modesty,” and especially the recommendation that the habit be “in keeping with the requirements of hygiene.”

Even as late as 1962, the inaugural year of the Second Vatican Council, the Holy Names sisters had not entered into formal discussion of ‘simplified habits’ (habits with knee-

⁵⁴ In part, the reason for the reduction of the width of the coif may have been the need for sisters to have greater visibility in order to drive automobiles.

⁵⁵*Acts and Recommendations of the 1961 General Chapters of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, p. 24-25.

length shirts and smaller veils), although the Ursuline community did so at their 1957 Chapter. In fact, the 1962 edition of the Holy Names Book of Customs offered rigid prescriptions regarding traditional dress with no indication of a view to the adoption of a simplified habit.⁵⁶ It may be, however, that this reiteration of regulations indicates an awareness of, but at the same time a resistance to, more radical changes in traditional dress.⁵⁷

Pre-conciliar Reform and the Horarium

In addition to his recommendation for a reconsideration of the style of habits, Pius XII drew Superiors' attention to the possibility that a rigid horarium might be detrimental to the work of teaching sisters:

It is possible that certain features of the *horarium* or order of day, certain prescriptions, which are not simply applications of the Rule, certain customs which corresponded, perhaps, to the conditions of another period, but which today only complicate the work of education, ought to be adapted to new circumstances.⁵⁸

Once again, this is not a directive to make *specific* changes, but merely a suggestion that horaria which are too rigorous may be impeding sisters' work in education. The 'certain prescriptions' to which Pius XII refers would include everything from scheduled times for rising and retiring, to the required number of hours to be spent in prayer and/or spiritual reading, to the times allotted for meals and recreation, all of which would vary from congregation to congregation, both in their content and impact. (See Appendix 5 for horaria

⁵⁶*Constitution of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, 1962, articles 247 - 262. S.N.JM. Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

⁵⁷The transition from the traditional habit to simplified habits, and eventually to secular dress, will be examined in Chapter 2.

⁵⁸“‘Religious Life and Teaching’: Allocution to teaching Sisters, September 13, 1951,” in *The States of Perfection*, 1967, 413.

of the Holy Names and Ursuline communities.)⁵⁹ The rather vague nature of Pius XII's statement can, in part, be attributed to the fact that it was intended to reach a global audience. For example, some activities affected by the horarium, such as the directive to be in the convent before nightfall, may have been more of a concern for communities located in northern climates where such regulations, when combined with long winters and shorter days, made it more difficult for teaching sisters to attend after-school meetings.

It is clear, in the recollections of sisters who belonged to communities in the 1950s, that there was some conflict between the rigid schedule of the convent and the expectations of the modern world. One Ursuline sister noted:

Schoolteachers all had to go to meetings at night - and then you were told you had to be home by the time the sun goes down. Well, you weren't hardly out of the house by then. So there was a lot of conflict that way, trying to do things. We hadn't adjusted really to what we were doing.⁶⁰

A Holy Names sister recalled that she, and others, in order to keep up with the demands of teaching, sometimes marked student assignments late at night despite the nine o'clock 'lights out' imposed by their horarium.⁶¹

Though there is no indication that the horaria of the Ursuline or Holy Names communities underwent revision in the 1950s, it would seem, as noted in the above examples, that at least some sisters perceived a need for change to their long-standing, rigid schedules. While communities' horaria had met the needs of traditional convent life in decades and centuries past, by the 1950s, sisters perceived discrepancies between the demands of their

⁵⁹These remained in place from the times of the communities' foundings to the Vatican II era.

⁶⁰Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁶¹Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 15 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

work and the restrictive schedules of their daily living. The sisters' perceptions that teaching placed demands that were difficult to meet within the bounds of traditional horaria may be, at least in part, due to the glut of baby-boomers in the elementary school system in the 1950s. Both Ursuline and Holy Names sisters reported outrageously high class sizes in this period. For example, Sister Suzanne reported teaching a first-grade class of 52 in 1958, and Sister Gloria taught 60 second-grade students in the same period.⁶² Further, as Elizabeth Smyth argues, the demands of teaching in the postwar period was also exacerbated by the increasing professionalization of the profession, which would, as noted in the following section, lead to unprecedented competition between laypeople and religious.⁶³

Pre-conciliar Reform and the Education of Women Religious

Probably the most significant and efficacious recommendations for teaching congregations in the 1950s were the mandates for increased training and further education for sisters:

It is Our most earnest desire that all should strive to become perfect. But this supposes that your religious know and are in perfect possession of their matter. Take steps, therefore, to procure for them good preparation and training, which will correspond also to the exactions and to the degrees required by the State. Give them with great liberality all they need, especially in what concerns books, so that even later they will be able to keep up with the progress of their science or their subject, and thus offer to young people a rich and solid harvest of knowledge.⁶⁴

The demands of the State to which the Pope refers were rising in North America in the 1950s

⁶²Ibid.; Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

⁶³Elizabeth Smyth, "Professionalization among the Professed: The Case of Roman Catholic Women Religious," *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work*, ed. E. Smyth et. al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 249.

⁶⁴"'Religious Life and Teaching': Allocution to Teaching Sisters, September 13, 1951," in *The States of Perfection*, 414.

as the Baby Boom generation entered the school systems; this caused an increase in the size of educational institutions and their bureaucratic structures, and placed greater emphasis on the professional expectations of teachers. Pius XII's recommendations for 'good preparation and training' were essential to the demands of modern educational systems, and studies of North American women religious in post-Vatican II era are rich with evidence that communities

took these recommendations for further education and training for sisters to heart. By 1965, according to *The Census of Religious Sisters of Canada*, approximately 25% of women religious held at least a bachelor's degree, with almost 6% of sisters holding graduate degrees. By 1965, 83% of sisters had some post-secondary education (i.e. certificates or diplomas), many in the area of teacher accreditation.⁶⁵

The introduction of new educational opportunities for teachers in the Holy Names community is acknowledged as a significant event in their history. Sister M. Louise-de-France, Provincial Superior of the Ontario Province of the Holy Names Sisters from 1956-1965, was the first Superior of the community to permit sisters to devote themselves to full-time study. Typically, in her years as a novice a young sister would complete high school (if need be), attend Normal School in the summer session, and then begin teaching on a full-time basis. If it was the desire of her Superior that a young sister should pursue a B.A. or other qualifications or degrees, this would usually be done at summer school or by 'extension.' Apart from her months of study as a postulant, most sisters would not, under normal circumstances, be permitted the luxury of full-time study. It is significant, therefore, that

⁶⁵Marc A. Lessard and Jean Paul Montminy, *The Census of Religious Sisters of Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Religious Conference, 1966), 340. This published census recorded statistics on 65,248 sisters in Canada, or 98.4% of women religious, for the year 1965.

Sister Louise-de-France elected to send six students to university for full-time study in 1961, and thirteen in 1962.⁶⁶

Holy Names sisters reflecting on this period note the impact of these increased opportunities for education. One sister, who entered the community in 1955, recalled:

It was an exciting time, a time of searching. . . . It was also a time when we could study You realized it sort of put us as women religious highly educated, because we studied every summer *and* we studied during the year. You realized that once you are educated you've got something more . . . you have a little more self-confidence in knowing what's going on.⁶⁷

An Ursuline sister recalled studying both by distance education and attending summer school in the late 1950s:

Every summer we went to Brescia [Brescia College, University of Western Ontario] and did summer school, picking up two courses every summer towards our degree. And I also began fairly early on doing a course during the year as well by correspondence. So by 1964, when I finally finished my degree, I think I must have had about twenty-one undergraduate courses.⁶⁸

Though working toward a bachelor's degree over several summers and by distance learning remained the norm for many sisters, the increase in opportunities for study, whether full- or part-time, was an important aspect of change in their lives in the pre-conciliar years.

Clearly, Pius XII's counsel regarding adaptations to women's religious communities was considered and, in some respects, acted upon. The three most prominent aspects of reform for women religious in teaching communities in this pre-conciliar period - the religious habit, the horarium and teacher training - were, largely, external changes which would involve some, if relatively minor, adaptation to traditional practices and procedures. The Ursuline and Holy Names communities share the common experience of having at least

⁶⁶Batte, *Rooted in Hope*, 323.

⁶⁷Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

⁶⁸Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

considered adaptations to the horarium and in placing an increased focus on teacher training. With regard to dress, the Ursulines' willingness to discuss more radical changes to the habit pre-dates the Holy Names community's willingness to do so. This may, in part, be due to the fact that the Holy Names' Mother House, the seat of their governance, was in Quebec - traditionally a more conservative Catholic province - whereas the Ursulines were based in Ontario.

Even sisters who did not hold positions of authority, and who were not, therefore, privy to first-hand information and documentation regarding the scope of reform, recall a sense that there was a purposefulness to small reforms in the 1950s. A sister who had entered religious life in 1950 reflected: "there was a call, seemingly, to change in some areas and I don't think we knew, as yet, how it was going to change. We were being educated, I think, with an openness to a future that might change."⁶⁹

In this pre-conciliar period, reform was guided from the top down; that is, the dictates flowed from the Pope and the Sacred Congregation of Religious in Rome to the Superiors of communities, who then filtered the information, as they saw fit, to their members. While some members - those on the General Council, or those who were delegates to General Chapters - seemed to have a sense that change was on the horizon, it is likely that not all sisters were apprised of the particular 'adaptations' suggested during Pius XII's papacy. For a few reasons, this would shift in the coming years.

First, when Pius XII called for a Second General Congress on the States of Perfection in 1957, over 25 national organizations were represented, including the Canadian Religious Congress (CRC), an umbrella organization of both men and women religious founded in

⁶⁹Mary Teresa Antaya, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

1955. No longer was the Vatican's communication directly with Superior Generals; rather, national organizations, with representation from virtually all religious communities around the globe, were poised to begin a new phase of reform. The CRC, from this period onward, would issue regular communiques to *all* members of religious communities.

Second, the demands of the State regarding education referred to by Pius XII in the 1950s would take an even more drastic turn in the next decade, particularly in Canada. With the influx of the baby boom, Ontario's separate schools were faced with a demand for more teachers. Further, as appeals were made by citizen groups and newly formed teacher federations for equalized funding for separate schools, there was increased pressure put on Catholic schools to deliver programs comparable to their public counterparts.⁷⁰ Women's religious communities were forced to do more than just 'adapt' to the changing climate of educational institutions. Concerted efforts at renewal in the area of teacher education would be necessary to keep pace with the needs of educational systems in the latter half of the twentieth century. Further, as the numbers of lay teachers in the separate school system increased in order to meet the demands of the 1950s school population, women religious would have unprecedented contact with their lay counterparts. This would have significant effect on women's roles and self-definitions, and on the communities' understandings of their own charisms in the decades following the Second Vatican Council.

Third, the transition from the papacy of Pius XII to that of John XXIII had substantial influence on the direction of reform in religious communities. Pius XII's call for 'adaptation' would be extended and subsumed by his successor's call to 'renewal'. The Second Vatican

⁷⁰ Mark McGowan, "Distinctly Catholic: The Development of Catholic Schools in Ontario," p. 5.
<http://www.pvnccdsb.on.ca/library/Distinctly%20Catholic/Development%20of%20Catholic%20Sch.pdf>, accessed on 24 May 2006.

Council, though itself an *external* factor affecting reform in women's religious communities, would shift the emphasis of reform from adaptation to renewal; that is, from a focus on exterior changes to more interior, spiritual ones. The third and final section of this Chapter will provide an overview of conciliar reform mandates and the efforts of the Ursuline and Holy Names communities to address these directives.

Pope John XXIII, The Second Vatican Council, Women Religious and Renewal

Upon the death of Pope Pius XII in 1958, Angelo Guisepe Roncalli was elected his successor. Initially, it was believed that the seventy-seven-year-old would serve a relatively short and uneventful term. As theologian Hans Kung notes, Roncalli, who chose the papal name John XXIII, was generally viewed as a “transitional pope;” however, argues Kung, “he became the pope of an epoch-making transition which released the Catholic Church from its internal rigidity.”⁷¹ Shortly after his election, John XXIII surprised the world with the call for a Vatican Council. When asked what he expected from the Council, John XXIII pointed toward an open window, and offered the characteristically modest reply, “A breath of fresh air in the Church.”⁷² The reign of Pope John XXIII would, in fact, revolutionize modern Roman Catholicism, announcing a new agenda of *aggiornamento*, that is, “bringing up to date.”⁷³

⁷¹Kung, *The Catholic Church*, 180.

⁷²Henri Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II: The Ecumenical Council, June 1962-December 1965*, trans. Bernard Murchland (Toronto: Random House, 1967), 27.

⁷³*Aggiornamento*, or “bringing up to date,” is “a term which has become synonymous with the Church renewal initiated by John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. *Aggiornamento* called for a new openness on the part of the Church toward the world, and toward other Christian churches and non-Christian religions. . . . *Aggiornamento* also called for the internal reform and renewal of the Church.” *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1st ed., Richard P. McBrien, editor. New York: HarperCollins, 1995, 25.

In the planning stages since 1959, John XXIII convened the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church, commonly known as the Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, in 1962.⁷⁴ Over a four year period, from 1962 to 1965,⁷⁵ the Council's committees of bishops, priests, religious and laity addressed numerous issues pertinent to Church reform in the twentieth century. Under review were such topics as the role of the Church in the modern world, reforms to liturgy, the Church's commitment to ecumenism, the relationship of the Church to non-Christian faiths, the role of religious men and women, the role of the laity, education, and the issue of religious freedom.

Conciliar discussions led to numerous doctrinal statements on each topic, urging unprecedented changes in the practice and understanding of Roman Catholicism.⁷⁶ With these articulations of new directions and doctrines, the two thousand-year-old Church had entered into process of redefining itself and its place in the modern world. Most specific to an appraisal of change in religious communities in this period are reforms to liturgical practices, certain new theological trends, and, most particular to this study, the proposed reforms to religious life as articulated in the document *Perfectae Caritatis*.

Before proceeding to examine the key reforms to liturgy, theology and religious life pertinent to this study of women religious, it is important note the gender composition of the

⁷⁴Nearly a century had passed since the First Vatican Council, or Vatican I (1869- 1870). Held in a period of extreme ultramontane authority, among the most central doctrines of Vatican I was that of Papal Infallibility. From its inception, Vatican II promised to be less doctrinal and more pastoral in its approach.

⁷⁵Though John XXIII conceived of and convened the Second Vatican Council, he died in 1962. Paul VI, his successor, would continue the conciliar mandate.

⁷⁶For an English-language compendium of the sixteen official documents of the Second Vatican Council, including commentary on each, see *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., trans. ed. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966).

Council itself. When the first session of the Second Vatican Council began in 1962, 2500 bishops gathered from around the globe, joined by hundreds of clerical and lay delegates and auditors; yet not one woman was included in the Council sessions. This omission received minimal attention in the mainstream press, though reporting on the issue increased between 1961 and 1963, with the religious press (most notably *The Sign*, *Ave Maria*, and *America*) giving voice to the concerns of such groups as the U.S.-based National Council of Catholic Women's concerns.⁷⁷ In September, 1963, Pope Paul VI announced that fifteen women would be invited to attend the third session of the Council as auditors, including one North American woman, Mary Luke Tobin, S.L.⁷⁸; over the next year, eight more would be added to their number.⁷⁹

The presence of women at the Council, already minimal given the wildly disproportionate ratio of men to women, was further limited by restrictions placed on the women auditors, such as their assignment only to meetings at which questions regarding

⁷⁷For a detailed accounting of the escalation of press coverage on the issue, see Helen Marie Ciernick, "Cracking the Door: Women at the Second Vatican Council" in *Women and Theology*. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski, eds. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994). Ciernick also notes that in 1994, nearly thirty years after the close of the Council, only three scholarly articles have been published on the topic of the women of Vatican II and their activities, the most important of which she cites as M. Carmel McEnroy, R.S.M., "Women of Vatican II: Recovering a Dangerous Memory," in *The Church in the Nineties: Its Legacy, Its Future*, ed. Pierre Hegy (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 149-57.

⁷⁸In 1963 Sister Mary Luke Tobin was the Superior General of the Sisters of Our Lady of Lorreto and President of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious (an American umbrella organization for women's religious communities). Coincidentally, as I was writing this chapter in late August 2006, Sister Mary Luke died at the age of 98, in her 80th year of religious life. I would speculate that her recent death may spark renewed interest in the pioneering role played by Tobin at the Second Vatican Council.

⁷⁹Ciernick, "Cracking the Door," 70-71.

women were on the agenda, gender-segregated seating at the sessions, and even their relegation to a women's coffee bar.⁸⁰ Ciernick makes special note of the fact that although women auditors were active in the commission on the laity, they were "banned from the Committee on Religious Life until the end [of the session]."⁸¹ Consequently, the deliberations and decisions that most impacted the lives of women religious were conducted largely by male clerics.

As the Council progressed, however, the women auditors asserted themselves and attended sessions other than those specific to women's issues. In large part, their success in moving beyond their assigned roles is attributed to several progressive male clerics and theologians, most notably Cardinal Emilio Guano and theologian Bernard Haring, who advocated on their behalf and were instrumental in helping women find a place and a voice at the later Council sessions.⁸² In spite of some minor gains, given their limitations in both numbers and influence, it can be concluded that women had relatively little input on the content of the Council documents.

Liturgical and Theological Reforms

While sisters' reactions to and understandings of these aspects of conciliar reform will be discussed in subsequent Chapters, a brief discussion of key liturgical and theological trends is essential as it provides the context within which religious life would be reformed. The Second Vatican Council initiated appreciable changes to liturgy. In sum, these include the celebration of the mass in the vernacular (as opposed to the centuries-old use of Latin as

⁸⁰Ibid., 71.

⁸¹Ibid., 73.

⁸²Ibid.

the universal language of the Church); the incorporation of modern music, art and cultural symbols in places of worship; and a renewed emphasis on the Bible in worship and individual piety. As a result of these reforms, Sunday worship and sacramental rites became more accessible and participatory, and clergy, religious and laity alike were profoundly affected by these changes.⁸³

Among the most significant theological shifts is the concept of the Church as the “People of God”, to which “all men [sic] are called to belong.”⁸⁴ No longer would the Church be identified exclusively with its hierarchical male clergy, nor would it be defined by ornate buildings, or via Medieval codes and ultramontane pronouncements; rather, the ‘people’ were the substance of the Church, its purpose for existence and its determining influence.

Further, in its discussion of the organizational structure of the Church, “*Lumen Gentium*” makes purposeful delineations between the ordained male priesthood and vowed religious. While the concept of the ‘People of God’ denotes inclusiveness, it does not preempt a hierarchical structure; in fact, “*Lumen Gentium*” clearly specifies an exclusively male power structure. Although women religious had never been officially regarded as members of the hierarchy, they had long been commonly considered by the faithful to occupy an elevated status in the Church’s power structure. With “*Lumen Gentium*” the Church made it clear that “the religious state of life is not an intermediate one between the

⁸³The document “*Sacrosantum Concilium*” outlines the Church’s reforms to the aforementioned aspects of liturgy and offers prescriptions for their implementation. *The Documents of Vatican II*, 137-178.

⁸⁴See “*Lumen Gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”, chapter II, sections 9-17), *The Documents of Vatican II*, 30. See Chapter II, p. 24-37 for further discourse on the term “People of God”.

clerical and lay states” and that religious were to be considered among the ‘laity’ rather than as members of the clergy.⁸⁵ This, too, would affect women religious and their self-understanding in the post-Vatican II era.

Another important theological distinction of Vatican II is embodied in the Council’s statement on Religious Freedom, “*Dignitatis Humanae*.” This final document of the Council, and arguably its most controversial, underscores the notion of religious freedom as a fundamental human right, and asserts the primacy of the informed conscience as the final arbiter in moral decision-making.⁸⁶ Given the Church’s longstanding traditions of legalism and authoritarian rule in matters of ethics, this statement regarding freedom of conscience was monumental, setting the stage for a highly individualistic attitudes toward reform.

Most important to an understanding of reform in women’s religious communities is the conciliar document “*Perfectae Caritatis*, the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life” which encouraged religious communities to implement reforms in such areas as dress, daily life, and organizational structure. As noted in the discussion of Pius XII’s pre-conciliar reforms, many aspects of these changes had been discussed in the preceding decade as ways and means by which women’s religious communities might *adapt* to the modern world. Yet the tone and content of *Perfectae Caritatis* revealed that in this new conciliar era of reform, adaptation would also be accompanied by ‘renewal.’

The document’s introduction states that the decrees therein “concern . . . the general principles which must underlie an appropriate *renewal* of the life and rules of religious

⁸⁵*Lumen Gentium*, in Documents of Vatican II, p. 74.

⁸⁶See *Dignitatis Humanae*, Introduction and chapter I, sections 1-3, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 672-81.

communities” [emphasis mine].⁸⁷ Less tangible, and certainly more intrinsic to the identities of communities, renewal would require not only exterior changes (such as modifications to or discarding of outdated dress), but also interior changes (such as new understandings of each congregation’s charism). *Perfectae Caritatis* emphasizes that interior renewal is to be granted primary importance: “Indeed such an interior renewal must always be accorded the leading role even in the promotion of exterior works.”⁸⁸ This shift from adaptation to renewal, from exterior modification to interior transformation, would necessitate involved processes of discernment and reflection on the part of the women and their communities.

Theologian Joan Chittister, reflecting on her own Benedictine community’s interpretation of *Perfectae Caritatis*, recalls that an endlessly repeated “slogan” emerged, summarizing the three key tenets of the document: “the vision of the founder, the needs of the members, and the signs of the times.”⁸⁹ Women religious around the globe were called to interpret and internalize these three aspects of renewal, no easy task to be sure. In the remainder of this Chapter, two of these three aspects of renewal will be considered - the vision of the founder and the needs of the members. These will be outlined with a view to what enacting these reforms would mean for women religious generally, and for the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters specifically. Chapters Two and Three will refocus, reprise and extend this discussion to include the ‘signs of the times’ - those factors in secular society that would affect renewal in women’s religious communities. Additionally, subsequent Chapters will explore in greater detail how this renewal was realized in particular practices during the Vatican II and immediate post-Vatican II years, and how these new ideas and practices

⁸⁷*Perfectae Caritatis* in *Documents of Vatican II*, art. 1, 467.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, art. 2.(e), 469.

⁸⁹Chittister, *The Way We Were*, 113.

affected women's self- understandings.

Perfectae Caritatis called specifically for religious to return to the “spirit of founders” and the “particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community.”⁹⁰ The processes of change which occurred within women's religious communities were guided in large part, therefore, by the orders' re-acquaintances with their own histories. Often, when women religious began to look carefully at the histories of their own communities, they discovered that their communities were not initially intended to be cloistered entities, separate from the world. Rather, many women's religious communities were founded on the premises of shared mission, common faith, and collegiality, and they were intended to be active agents for social service within their towns and cities.

For example, the Ursuline order had been founded in Italy in the early sixteenth century by Angela Merici, whose intention it was to bring together a group of women dedicated to works of charity. The original followers of Angela, who came to call themselves the Company of St. Ursula, were unmarried women who dressed in simple fashions of the time, lived in their own homes and came together to pray and to do charitable works. In less than a century the Ursulines had grown in popularity in both Italy and France and they numbered in the thousands. In the mid-sixteenth century the Council of Trent imposed strict regulations on religious communities. All women's communities, including the Ursulines, were to be cloistered, were forced to adopt a strict monastic Rule, were required to wear a severe clerical habit, and they were to be subject to the jurisdiction of a bishop who acted as their ecclesiastical superior.⁹¹ These practices continued, virtually unchanged, for four centuries.

⁹⁰*Perfectae Caritatis*, art. 2(b), 468.

⁹¹Pray, *Pilgrims in Service*, Vol. 1, 1860-1896, 5.

Angela's 'spirit', her original intent in founding the community, had not been the promotion of a strictly regulated, cloistered community. When Vatican II asked Ursulines to consider this aspect of renewal, they were obliged to consider whether their regimented daily lives, religious habit, top-down form of governance and communal, cloistered lifestyle was in keeping with their foundress's intention in establishing the community.

The Holy Names Sisters, founded in Quebec in the nineteenth century, did not have to look quite so far back in history to reacquaint themselves with their heritage. The Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary was founded in Canada in 1843 by Mother Marie Rose, herself a product of the ultramontane, colonial Catholicism of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the Holy Names sisters of the 1950s continued to live in a fashion very similar to the intent of their foundress. Some of the sisters interviewed for this project spoke of having met much older sisters in the 1950s and 60s who had known their foundress.⁹² A mere two or three degrees of separation provided sisters who entered in the 1950s and 60s with a much greater sense of connection to their foundress and their history. The Holy Names community's post-Vatican II reconsideration of the vision of their foundress seems to be closely linked to a renewed appreciation for her spirit, as opposed to a 'return' to it. This resulted in a recognition of the sanctity of Mother Marie Rose and seems to have fuelled efforts by the community and its supporters to advocate for her canonization in the years following the Council.

For both the Holy Names and Ursuline sisters, consideration of the spirit of their foundress would necessitate a reevaluation of their role as teachers. Both communities bore a long history of work in education, especially the education of girls. Was their work in education in the twentieth century in keeping with the spirits of Angela and Marie Rose? Did

⁹²Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

the fact that at least some members of each community taught in elite boarding schools contradict Angela and Marie Rose's original intentions? How could their charisms be reconsidered with a view to the modern needs of the Church, the poor and children? Clearly, the dehistoricization of women's religious communities had so affected religious life that its rectification would require much more than a mere reconsideration of their foundresses' intentions; it would also necessitate a reconsideration of the essential meanings of their charisms in the modern world. As will become evident in subsequent chapters, the spirits of Angela and Marie Rose would serve to both stimulate and justify interior transformations of communities.

In addition to encouraging a rediscovery of the visions of the foundresses of religious communities, *Perfectae Caritatis* also called upon religious communities to reconsider the needs of their memberships. It is important to recall that in the pre-conciliar period, reform was guided from the top down; that is, the dictates flowed from the Pope and the Sacred Congregation of Religious in Rome, to the Superiors of communities, who then filtered the information, as they saw fit, to their members. The Superiors of communities, therefore, determined the desires and needs of the members. This would change significantly in the Vatican II era.

Perfectae Caritatis required that "the manner of living, praying, and working should be adapted to the physical and psychological conditions of today's religious." This would necessitate revisions to "constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies" and the "suppression of outmoded regulations."⁹³ These aspects of renewal would be no easy task, especially given the admonition that "successful and proper

⁹³*Perfectae Caritatis*, art. 3, 469.

adaptation cannot be achieved unless every member of a community cooperates.”⁹⁴ Renewal in matters of lifestyle, spirituality and work would, therefore, be a cooperative effort. How would this be realised given the top-down model of governance in place in religious communities?

Responding to this challenge, in less than a decade from the start of Vatican II many women’s religious communities moved from top-down models of governance, wherein typically a Mother Superior and a small Council made all decisions, to much more participatory and egalitarian democratic processes. In both the Ursuline and the Holy Names communities, this was a gradual process. The archival records and oral histories of both communities indicated that vehicles for consultation and experimentation were implemented.

Consultation took many forms. First, greater representation was encouraged at the communities’ General Chapters. In the Ursuline community ‘observer’ status was granted to additional members of the community at the 1967 Extraordinary Chapter, over and above the elected delegates.⁹⁵ Gradually the slate of delegates was expanded until, by 1980, any Ursuline who wished to attend General Chapter was permitted and encouraged to do so. Sister Frances, General Superior of the congregation from 1977 to 1985 summarizes:

So then when the ‘67 Chapter happened, very shortly after that. . . consultations became widened. . . we were broadening out decision-making in a sense, that, eventually, everybody who wanted to go to Chapter as an observer could go.⁹⁶

This gradual shift to a more broad-based and inclusive model of decision-making was feasible due to the Ursuline community’s relatively small (and declining) membership, and

⁹⁴*Perfectae Caritatis*, art. 4, 469.

⁹⁵*Minutes of the Extraordinary General Chapter, July 1967, Chatham, Ontario*. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁹⁶Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

relatively limited geographical scope. The Ontario Province of the Holy Names, given their ties to a much larger community with provinces world-wide, would take a different approach to consultation.

Until 1971, Provincial Superiors of the Holy Names congregation had been appointed by the General Superior in Montreal; in effect, Provinces had little autonomy when it came to decisions specific to their own regions. As a means by which to encourage greater local input, this regulation was changed in the post-Vatican II era to allow for local elections. Elected on December 31, 1976, at the age of thirty-nine, Gloria Drouillard became not only the youngest Provincial Superior in the congregation's history, but also the first *elected* Provincial Superior of the Ontario Province. In addition, a Provincial Council was elected as an advisory body to the Provincial Superior.⁹⁷ Unlike the Ursulines, even to this day only elected delegates attend the Holy Names congregation's General Chapters. The size of the congregation and its global nature make universal attendance at General Chapters impractical. Provincial Chapters, however, assist in bridging communications between the distinct provinces and the Montreal-based Generalate.

In addition to reforms to governance, greater consultation was achieved in the post-Vatican II era by the formation of committees. For example, the archives of both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities preserve documents related to the Experimentation Committees which dealt with the reform of the habit and the transition to what might be called 'small community living,' or the shift to living in smaller houses apart from the large Mother House. While the outcomes of these 'experiments' will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the fact of their emergence within the conciliar period is significant. Members of

⁹⁷Batte, *Rooted in Hope*, 508. This event was also described by Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

both communities note the novelty of being consulted, rather than instructed, on such matters. Sister Kathleen recalled, “It felt like a breath of fresh air, and a sense of freedom to keep exploring.”⁹⁸ Sister Dorothy, when asked about changes in community decision-making in the period stated simply that everything seemed “more relaxed. It wasn’t top-down, it was *us*.”⁹⁹

In addition to the use of simple questionnaires, the process of experimentation involved practical experiments in daily living. In both communities, the transitions to modified habits, and eventually to secular dress, were gradual. Sisters on the Experimentation committees, and other community members solicited by the committees, were given limited permissions to ‘try on’ new modes of dress and to report back to the committees.

Sister Frances recalled participation in the very early stages of experimentation with the Ursulines’ modified habit, a shortened skirt, blouse and jacket in blue or black:

Several people volunteered to experiment with lay clothes or with a modified habit. And this happened early, because I went to Notre Dame [University in Indiana] to study for a summer in the mid-sixties, and I wore one of the first modified habits. Another sister and I went to Notre Dame that summer and I remember they were rushing to get the modified habit ready for us. . . .At Notre Dame . . .we were among the first from the United States or Canada to wear the modified habit. So we were quite the phenomenon - we had to undress and show our clothes to the other nuns in the residences from other communities!¹⁰⁰

Sister Rose Marie, who entered the Ursuline community in 1964, recalled her excitement as a young sister participating in experimentation:

⁹⁸Kathleen O’Mara, O.S.U., interview by author, 23 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁹⁹Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

¹⁰⁰Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

They asked for people . . . to experiment just wearing ordinary dress, like you and I are wearing now. And so I volunteered thinking, 'well I'm only in the beginning stages, they're never going to let me do it.' They did! So I was one of the people who was 'in' earlier than the rest.¹⁰¹

The excitement at the novelty of wearing simplified habits is evident in the above recollections. As will be examined later in this thesis, these initial experiments paved the way for radical changes in traditional dress and the eventual adoption of lay clothing, transitions that would prove both liberating and challenging. (See appendix E for photographs of modified habits.)

Though Holy Names sisters recall participation in the experimentation process, they do not describe their participation in quite so purposeful a way as do the Ursuline sisters.

Sister Gloria's account of late 1960s modifications to dress is revealing:

We went through shorter dresses - maybe an inch every five years until it got to ankle-length. And then we started with less material in the part that was the horse-blinkers, so that it got a little bit smaller. And then they took off the bandeau part and just had a veil, a black veil with a white band around it. And they got rid of the dress and the cape eventually, and we just had shorter skirt and a black top, or a white blouse with a little jacket.¹⁰²

Though Holy Names sisters participated in experimentation projects, and adapted to experimental changes, they seemed to have less sense of ownership in the processes than did the Ursuline sisters. This is likely because the governance of the community was based in Montreal, and the Ontario Province did not yet have an elected Provincial Superior. Experimentation also began a few years later in the Holy Names community, and seemed to have been implemented with greater control by the Generalate of the community. For example, in addition to experimentation with modified habits and lay clothing,

¹⁰¹Rose Marie Blonde, O.S.U., interview by author, 15 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

¹⁰²Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

experimentation was also conducted in the areas of community living. (Both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities experimented with small group living in the years immediately following Vatican II and, as we shall see in Chapter Two, these experiments had profound impact at both the personal and communal levels.) One incident, in particular, reveals much about the nature of experimentation in the Holy Names community. Sister Maureen tells of her experience in the late-1960s with a small group of sisters in Windsor who were experimenting with alternative community living and new forms of prayer:

We got experimenting . . . and that went well. We loved it. We were very happy. . . We thought it was great. Then someone in office that came from Montreal came and spent time with us and happened to write back and say what we were doing, and that got squashed and we had to stop what we were doing, temporarily.¹⁰³

Although eventually permission to experiment in the areas of small group living and prayer was reinstated, this temporary restriction on the part of the Generalate of the community was a telling event in the lives of the women affected.

The shift from a top-down model to a more egalitarian one would happen more slowly in the Holy Names community than in the Ursuline community. The geographic distance between the Ontario Province and their Quebec-based Generalate, and the fact that Provincial leadership was appointed rather than elected in the immediate Vatican II years contributes to this difference. Further, the political tensions in late-1960s Quebec, the secularization of the province and the waning of ecclesial control likely influenced the relative conservatism of the bilingual, Quebec-founded Holy Names community, relative to their English-Ontario Ursuline counterparts.

Despite differences in the speed and influence of implementation of such reform

¹⁰³Maureen Hussey, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 26 November 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

efforts as experimentation with dress, both communities entered into this period of reform, setting processes in place to take into consideration the needs of their membership and to include them in initial Vatican II reform efforts.

Conclusion

Within a year of the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, efforts toward reform and renewal were well underway in women's religious communities around the globe, and the Ursuline and Holy Names communities were in step with this trend. On-going discussions regarding governance and further modifications to new models of community living and dress would be consolidated at mandated 'extraordinary' chapters in 1967 and 1968.¹⁰⁴ While this was an era of excitement and promise, it was also a time of rapid change and adjustment on the part of individual sisters, requiring careful and sensitive negotiation on the parts of communities.

In examinations of both Pius XII's statements and encyclicals to women religious in the 1950s and the documents regarding renewal issued by Second Vatican Council, it becomes clear that these may be characterized as 'top-down' models of reform. Not only were these directives issued by the male hierarchy of institutional Roman Catholic Church, but they were also released to and mediated by the Superior Generals of women's religious communities. Especially in the pre-Vatican II period, the rank and file sisters would have had very little direct access to official Church statements. Much decision-making power, then, continued to rest in the hands of the Superior Generals and their elected councils.

¹⁰⁴The papal encyclical *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, issued by Paul VI in August 1966, set forth directions for the implementation of the Vatican II document, *Perfectae Caritatis*. Among its most important directive was the mandate that "a special general chapter . . . should be convened within two or at most three years to promote the adaptation and renewal of each institute." Additionally, the mandated chapter condoned "experiments contrary to the common law, provided that they are undertaken prudently." *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, p. 15, articles 3, 6.

Relatedly, pre-conciliar initiatives presumed that change could be negotiated from within religious communities while the Church itself remained virtually unchanged. However, while Pius XII sought to affect adaptations within the Church without reforming the institution itself, John XXIII's platform of *aggiornamento* was more far-reaching and comprehensive. The renewal initiated by Vatican II was not limited exclusively to ecclesial reform, but it was also inspired by the Church's desire to discern its place in the modern world. Because teaching sisters worked 'in the world', they would have had an unprecedented awareness of and appreciation for conciliar renewal. This would have been especially true for those who worked in university settings as the libraries of Catholic colleges and universities would have kept up-to-date on developments in Church reform. The effect of such access to conciliar documents and related commentary on the spirituality of sisters will be examined further in Chapter 4.

Because they had been encouraged to adopt a view to reform in the pre-Vatican II era, by the mid-1960s women religious were ready to put structures in place that would enable them to realise both adaptations to traditional practices and renewal of community life. Their efforts toward 'renewal', which would stem in large part from their awareness of the 'spirit of foundresses' and 'the needs of the members', would lead women religious to reclaim their histories and to reassess their communities' models of governance. As described and analysed in previous paragraphs, there are appreciable differences in the approaches taken by the Ursuline and Holy Names communities, many of them based in issues of congregational structure, size and geography. Perhaps, too, subtle political and ideological differences emanating from Quebec's Quiet Revolution set the Ontario Province of the Holy Names Sisters, with its Montreal-based centralized governance, apart from other women religious in the same diocese, like the Ursulines, who were administered locally. It is clear, however,

that both communities addressed the salient issues of conciliar renewal and implemented new and revised structures in order to facilitate greater consultation of members in the reform process, and that individual members were aware of and involved in these efforts.

While Chapter 2 continues an 'outward' focus, acknowledging the sisters' perceptions of the 'signs of the times' in Church and society, it also embarks on an examination of the questions which arise *for the sisters themselves* in this period of change. While ecclesial initiatives and the resultant practicalities of negotiating community reform were a significant part of the lived experience of women religious in the Vatican II years, renewal also involved deeper and more personal interpretations and shifting understandings. When historians begin to look at the experience of renewal from a *feminist* perspective, that is, one which *places women, their experiences and views at the centre of the narrative*, numerous questions arise: What effect did more than a decade of focus on reform have on convent culture and on the sisters themselves? As more external reforms, such as those which affected regulations and governance, were implemented, what emerged for the sisters as *their* concerns, *their* anxieties, *their celebrations and their* experiences of change? How did the sisters come perceive and value change itself? In sum, how did change affect women religious and the way they navigated in the world? Further, and as will be addressed more fully in Chapter 3, what meaning did the experience of reform in the conciliar era bring to their self-knowledge; their understanding of gender; their sense of themselves as women?

CHAPTER TWO

THE 'INSIDE STORIES': THE URSULINE AND HOLY NAMES SISTERS' EXPERIENCES OF REFORM

Celebrated Canadian researcher and activist Ursula Franklin describes feminism as a process of reordering and reorienting:

Feminism isn't an employment agency for women; it's an alternative way of ordering the social space, in which women are the prototype rather than men. It is based on collaboration rather than competition. As a youngster, I still remember my feeling of joy that one could look at the earth differently. That's feminism: everything is differently oriented. Seeing the same world through different eyes.¹

Building upon Franklin's very approachable definition of feminism, history, when undertaken with a feminist analysis, reorients both researcher and reader. A feminist analysis of history not only places women at the centre of the research questions, but it also affords a gaze from which to 'see the same world through different eyes'.

The oral history project in which several Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters participated between 2001 and 2005 asked numerous questions about women's experiences in religious communities during the period of Vatican II reform. The project was designed and approached with a view not only to gathering information from individuals about the day-to-day, lived experiences of religious life and how it changed in the 1960s (as essential as this is), but also with the hope of gathering intimate reflections, impressions and 'inside stories' about reform and its effect on personal lives. The history which is constructed from these insights is an attempt to see the world through the eyes of sisters who lived, worked and worshipped in English Canada in the Vatican II era.

¹Quoted in Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin, 2005), 17.

While the previous chapter examined the history of the reform initiatives of the Roman Catholic male clergy and then noted the responses of women to these directives, the remainder of this project attempts to tell the story of reform from another angle - that is, from the perspective of the women themselves. As will become evident in this chapter, and in subsequent chapters of this work, the attempt to get 'inside' women's experiences of change necessitates more eclectic conceptual and theoretical approaches, distinct from those employed in Chapter One. A decidedly feminist theoretical approach is engaged throughout this and subsequent chapters, and a more probing discourse analysis is undertaken, particularly in Chapter Three. This is not to say that the research and analysis which follows serve as correctives to Chapter One; telling the story of reform from a different perspective - a woman-centred perspective - does not negate the more traditional, Church-oriented version of events. On the contrary, this new approach to the story reorients the reader, affording an 'insider' view on women's culture and experience, one which complements and completes the traditional 'Church-approved' story of reform.

This Chapter will examine and analyse four aspects of change in the lives of women religious in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. The first section, "From the 'We' to the 'I'," examines the regulatory and personal changes which facilitated an increased sense of individualism in sisters in the period. This linguistic and psychological transition helps to explain the other changes outlined in this Chapter. In section two, the phenomenon of 'unofficial' reform (that is, some sisters' bending and/or breaking of the rules before official reforms were initiated) is explored; section three uncovers new understandings and experiences of women's friendships within the convent in the period; and the last section of the chapter examines the adoption of new devotional practices. Taken together, these aspects of change indicate that, while guided by external ecclesial mandates, the direction of

reform was also influenced and shaped by communities and individuals and that, at times, the sisters themselves underwent change and transformations in advance of the implementation of external reforms in the Vatican II era.

From the ‘We’ to the ‘I’

Women’s historian and activist, Michèle Stanton-Jean, is credited with the following statement about Canadian women: “In the period from 1970 to 1981, women went from the ‘I’ to the ‘we’.”² In many respects, this is a valid statement. The second-wave women’s movement saw Canadian women come together to engage in collective activism around a number of issues - employment equity, reproductive rights, divorce laws and access to childcare, to name just a few. Women who, in previous decades, had been isolated, who felt that their battles were personal and not political, came to know that with the support and collaboration of other women, significant social and economic advances might be achieved.

As women religious entered into the gradual process of reform in the Vatican II era, changes to their traditional habits, their daily horaria, and their cloistered lifestyle, led to newfound freedoms in daily living which facilitated increased contact and a new relationship with the secular world. In a sense, women religious, previously set apart from the world, came to see themselves as part of the ‘we’ by the post-conciliar era. At the same time, in the preceding years women religious had entered in to a process of reform through which they came to articulate new and radical self-understandings which were more individualistic: before women religious could join lay women in moving “from the ‘I’ to the ‘we’,” women religious had to first move, *literally*, from the ‘we’ to the ‘I’ in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council.

²Quoted in Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, 47.

One fundamental observation in the general analysis of the oral history transcripts is that all the sisters interviewed were very careful to speak only of their own personal experiences. They spoke almost exclusively in the first person, they seemed cognizant of the fact that they could only address their own thoughts and feelings about the past, and they were careful to note that their opinions, views and stories did not necessarily represent those of their respective communities. The sisters often made statements like these:

I just remember, from my perspective, it was a very exiting time . . .³

I don't know that everybody had that experience. . .⁴

I don't know about the order, I can only know about me . . .⁵

I don't know for sure, because I wasn't in leadership then, . . .⁶

In terms of other people's comfort, I think some of the changes were probably helpful, but I don't really know. . .⁷

These sisters' statements reveal a strong sense of ownership of their personal experiences and a vigilance against speaking on behalf of other sisters or the community as a whole. Such statements are representative of a key post-Vatican II development in the lives and the self-perception of women religious; that is, a move to a much less communal and much more individualist orientation.

³Kathleen O'Mara, O.S.U., interview by author, 23 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁴Gloria Droulliard, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 22 November 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

⁵Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author, 15 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁶Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁷Sheila McKinley, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

An examination of communities' traditions and regulations regarding the use of possessive language will reveal that it is highly unlikely that these sisters would have been inclined to make statements like those above in the pre-Vatican II era. Regulations which prescribed the avoidance of singularity had governed religious life since the early monastic period, and the fifth-century Rule of St. Augustine, in which the Constitutions of the Ursulines and Holy Names Sisters have their origins, advised religious to "dwell in the house with oneness of spirit, and let your hearts and minds be one in God." Further, Augustinian rule prescribed that religious "call not anything the property of anyone, but let all things be common property."⁸ Hence, from the time of their founding, the communities' regulations required that the sisters adopt attitudes and language which would serve to promote a communal spirit and to discourage individualism. The Ursuline *Constitutions* note:

They will carefully avoid all singularity, and will study to have great conformity in words and actions, for by this it will be proved that they truly have but one heart and one soul in God, and that the one spirit of charity does indeed actuate every member of the Institute.⁹

This 'singularity' would be expressed in the language employed by the sisters. Not only was it customary for sisters to refer to themselves as 'we' rather than as 'I', but it was also required that, in order to promote a "spirit of detachment," sisters should refer to all possessions, even those that were strictly for personal use, in common.¹⁰ The Ursuline regulations stipulated: "The religious will call nothing given them for their use *mine*, as *my* habit, *my* cell, but will say *our* habit, *our* cell, and the same with other things." The Holy

⁸"The Rule of Our Holy Father St. Augustine," Ursuline Convent, "The Pines", 1952, p. 1, article 3. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁹*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union*, Ursuline Convent "The Pines", Chatham, Ontario, 1952, chapter IX, art. 8, p. 63-64. Ursuline Archives, Chatham Ontario.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, chapter II, art. 2, p. 2.

Names *Book of Customs* includes a very similar caveat: “Since in the congregation we have nothing as our own, we shall not say “my” or “mine” but “our” and “ours,” the latter being the term adopted in religion to signify a community of goods.”¹¹ As awkward as it may sound to secular ears, the mandated use of plural possessive language, even when referring to personal items like one’s own clothing, was common in religious life in the pre-Vatican II era as it served to promote a corporate spirit within the community.

For both the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters this practice would change in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. The Ursulines retracted the aforementioned regulations at their 1963 General Chapter. Included in their 1963 Chapter Promulgations is the statement, “The religious will use ‘my’ instead of ‘our’ when speaking of articles given them for their use.”¹² While there is no record of this change in the Holy Names Sisters’ Acts of Chapters during the 1960s, and while their *Book of Customs* was still followed through the 1960s, the regulation mandating the use of plural possessive language does not appear in the 1973 revision of their *Constitutions*, indicating that the regulation had been discarded in the intervening years.¹³

The move from the ‘we’ to the ‘I’, from an explicitly corporate to an implicitly individualist identification, is representative of a fundamental shift in the thinking of women religious. When asked to talk about “the most significant change in religious life in the

¹¹*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, 1962, art. 35, p. 6. S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

¹²*Minutes of the 1963 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

¹³*Constitutions of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Generalate, Outremont, Quebec, 1973. S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

Vatican II era, several sisters in the oral history project identified this shift to a more individualist orientation as either “the most significant change” or “one significant change” in their lives. The responses of about one-third of the sisters reflect such sentiments, and this reaction echoes the notion that women in religious communities underwent a ‘we’ to ‘I’ shift during this period of reform. Some examples include the following statements:

It has to do with . . . being respected as an adult who can make decisions for herself. . . . When we were able to make decisions and say ‘this is what *I* think *I* should do with *my* life.’¹⁴

I think it was the change to operating in a more adult model . . . more ‘individualistic’ or ‘independent’. I think the biggest change, basically, was that your life was not based on the ‘external’ process as much as on the ‘internal’ living out of something *you* believe and hold true.¹⁵

I think one of the significant things is we’ve gotten away from the ideas of the parent-child aspect of what religious were. The Mothers Superior were the ‘end all and be all’, and we were like the children. And I think it was the whole invitation for all of us to be adults. . . calling us to adulthood and to using our own gifts and our own experience and our own talents . . . calling us into that maturity . . .¹⁶

We were being treated more . . . as mature women rather than as children. . . . I think the freeing is the big thing. . . . There was that freeing to use our heads.¹⁷

The feelings that ‘individualism’ and being treated as ‘adults’ were among the most significant changes within communities in the Vatican II era resonates strongly in the above

¹⁴Gloria Droulliard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

¹⁵Maureen Hussey, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 26 November 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

¹⁶Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author.

¹⁷Patricia Anne Turner, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario,

representative selections. The sisters' recollections that the relationships among women in the convent were akin to 'parent/child' relationships, with the Superiors taking on a maternal role, is certainly a valid one. This was reflected even in the titles afforded the sisters. In the pre-Vatican II era, all Superiors - the elected Superior General and those appointed Superiors of smaller convents - were given the title, 'Mother', while the lower-ranking women were referred to by the title 'Sister'. In both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities this regulation was amended at their 1967 Chapters, and all members of the communities, except the Superior General, adopted the title 'Sister'.¹⁸ This served to obscure the former mother/child relationships among the women, affording religious a greater sense of autonomy. These changes to regulations regarding language were important first steps in enabling sisters to make choices in the areas of work, education, and beliefs, and consequently, they stand out for the sisters as turning points in their lives.

In addition to the ways in which a newfound individualism affected external changes to their lives in the areas of language and personal decision-making, a simultaneous inner reformation was occurring, and the amendments to regulations regarding language are emblematic of new understandings of self and community. Given the specific reforms to regulations governing language, and the resultant shift from the 'we' to the 'I', it is only logical that over the span of the 1960s women religious would gradually come to exercise this new sense of individualism, and that they would undergo incremental changes in their understandings about their personal lives, their interpersonal relationships, and, by extension, their spiritualities. In some aspects of convent life, there is evidence to support this

¹⁸*Minutes of the 1967 Extraordinary General Chapter*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario; *Minutes of the 1967 General Chapter*, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Mother House, Outremont, 1967. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

assumption that change would occur gradually from the early 1960s onward. Women religious increasingly made their own choices about work, and their attitudes toward and interactions with secular women changed gradually but markedly over the 1960s and into the 1970s. However, the sisters' oral narratives reveal that changes in thinking and decision-making did not always follow a predictable, linear progression.

'Unofficial' Reform

Among the most surprising and inspiring narratives gleaned from the oral history project were anecdotes about incidents that might be called 'unofficial reforms'. In these stories women told of unauthorized and sometimes precedent-setting actions which preceded official changes to regulations. These are stories about personal dissension, circumventing official protocols, and covert, incipient acts that took place between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, well before formal changes were put in place. It is noteworthy that these stories did not arise in sisters' recollections of earlier decades; rather, these stories of 'unofficial reform' seem to be unique to the immediate pre-Vatican II period. This may be due to the fact that sisters' perceptions of the need for change were heightened in this period, and therefore those women who possessed even limited authority took the initiative to bend the rules. It is also likely that Superiors, privy to Pius XII's 1950s' calls for adaptation, perceived that change was imminent and, therefore felt justified in relaxing the enforcement of some of the more innocuous regulations. Whatever the case, these stories of dissension stand out as turning points in pre-Vatican II convent culture.

Before entering into discussion of these stories of 'unofficial reform', it is important to note that these are gleaned exclusively from the oral history narratives of the sisters; there is little textual or archival material to corroborate the sisters' accounts. Heavy reliance on oral histories has been a source of some controversy among historians in past decades,

mainly regarding the question of the ‘objectivity’ of oral subjects and their claims. In 1997, Joan Sangster noted that “consideration of whether oral sources are ‘objective’ . . . still worries the profession.” However, as a women’s historian espousing a feminist theoretical analysis, I align myself with Sangster’s advocacy of oral sources, in that

the feminist embrace of oral history emerged from a recognition that traditional sources have often neglected the lives of women, and that oral history offered a means of integrating women into historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political importance that obscured women’s lives.¹⁹

As American oral historian Michael Frisch notes, oral history can serve as a valuable alternative to “imposed orthodoxy and officially sanctioned versions of historical reality.”²⁰

As this thesis attempts to explore reform from various angles - external and internal, top-down and bottom-up, official and unofficial - oral histories are particularly useful in understanding and analysing a history located outside of the ‘imposed orthodoxy’ of traditional Church history.

The Ursuline and Holy Names sisters’ stories of ‘unofficial reform’ may be viewed as belonging to two categories. First, sisters shared stories about their *personal recognition of the need for change*. Many of them came to these realizations long before their communities began even discussing certain reforms. The second type of stories told by the sisters were *disclosures in which they admitted to bending or disregarding the rules*, unbeknownst to their Superiors, well in advance of official reforms.

With regard to the first group of stories, it seems that many sisters saw the need for

¹⁹Joan Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” in *Rethinking Canada*, 3rd edition, Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita C. Feldman, eds. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 305.

²⁰Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), xxiii.

changes to dress and deportment long before specific changes were considered by their communities. Among the most telling narratives is a story relayed by Patricia Anne Turner, O.S.U., who entered the Ursuline community in the early 1940s. She had been a sister for more than a decade when, one day, as she was walking down the main street of a large city, she saw two old order Mennonite women walking ahead of her. In her words, “I thought to myself, ‘How strange!’ And then I saw my own reflection in the glass of one of the store windows and I thought, ‘Yes, how strange, that’s right.’”²¹ Sister Patricia Anne admitted that for years she had valued the habit for the respect and reverence that it commanded; but her experience of seeing herself as others saw her led her to recognize a need for change that she might not otherwise have perceived.

Many women told similar stories regarding behavioural expectations, and sisters often spoke of their struggles with certain aspects of deportment. The expectation that sisters practice what was known as “modesty of the eyes” - that is, refraining from unnecessary eye-contact, especially with men - seemed to be a very difficult rule for some to follow. Sister Gloria, a high school teacher for many years, said, “Here we were teaching big boys, and we weren’t supposed to look at men in the eyes, to practice modesty of the eyes? . . . It certainly wasn’t human!”²² Along the same lines, many sisters recalled working and trying to contend with the rule that sisters were to be in the convent before nightfall. As Mother Dominica, a

²¹Patricia Anne Turner, O.S.U., interview by author.

²²Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author. The Holy Names Sisters’ 1962 Book of Customs includes more than a dozen articles under the subtitle ‘Religious Modesty,’ and several of these refer to eye contact, including the following admonitions: “They shall not permit themselves to gaze about idly, nor shall they look fixedly at the person with whom they converse. They shall keep their eyes somewhat downcast, but in a natural, unaffected manner” (art. 125). Similarly, the Ursulines’ 1952 Constitutions warn: “The eyes should generally be downcast during the observances, when walking through the House, or when in other public places; at other times they should never rest with too fixed a gaze on anyone” (art. 29).

retired professor from Brescia College, put it:

Teachers all had to go to meetings at night - and then you were told you had to be home by the time the sun goes down. . . . there was a lot of conflict that way . . . We hadn't adjusted, really, to what we were doing.²³

These are just a few examples of the ways in which sisters described their own recognitions of the need for changes before reforms were initiated.

The second category of stories I have identified, those of sisters who bent or simply ignored the rules, contributes even further to an argument that unofficial changes preceded official reforms. Not only do these narratives demonstrate that women's communities guided their own processes of change, but it also shows that they had particular, individualist approaches to reform apart from the 'official' top-down model. These acts of defiance occurred most often at what we might call the 'middle-management' level of communities; that is, not by Mother Superior or her immediate council, and not by the rank-and-file sisters, but by the women who acted as Superiors of smaller convents or who held lesser positions of authority. Because many of these smaller convents would have been located in small towns and cities some distance from their central Mother House, perhaps these Superiors felt some freedom to bend the rules.

Sister Frances spoke of her years in the early 1960s as Superior of a small convent located in Stratford, Ontario, near a teachers' college. At the time, Sister Frances recalled, the community's rules explicitly forbade the nuns to carry money; yet, as Superior, she could not in good conscience send the young sisters in her charge off to school each day empty-handed.

I made all the sisters who were going to teachers' college take some money

²³Dominica. Dietrich, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

with them. We weren't allowed to. . . That was a breakthrough - they all had to carry money so that they could at least buy a coffee or something when they were at school. This was in the '60s - not that long ago - and things were sort of 'opening up.' And I wasn't the only one who was doing those little things, because by this time many of the people were, you know, *grown up* . . . they had good jobs, they were . . . principals of schools. . . That's when changes were beginning to creep in.²⁴

Sister Frances's description of the Superiors of small convents who were involved in the circumventing official protocols as 'grown up' is particularly salient. In her estimation, these surreptitious acts were a mark of the maturity of the women in authority, and a sign that women saw themselves as responsible to make their own decisions even if these were outside the boundaries of official regulations.

Sister Frances, and women like her, describe many other acts of defiance. For example, the regulation that Superiors of houses were to open the incoming and outgoing mail of the sisters in their charge was a responsibility that some Superiors simply refused to execute.

I refused to do it. I would say that I had, I just never did it. I never opened anyone's mail. And eventually it got around . . . and the General Superior said, 'I hear that you're not doing this'. And I said, 'No, I'm not, because I think it's an invasion of privacy. . . I'm not going to read their mail. I just don't think that it's right.' And she didn't believe in it either. And that was a sign that we were becoming sort of sensitized to changes, and to the fact that some of this was wrong.²⁵

Similarly, Sister Gloria recalls that she, and others, stopped enforcing rules around silence in advance of official change.

I think the changes came about because people started doing what was the right thing instead of being told what to do and at what time you had to do it. . . So to say 'when did we stop having Grand Silence at nine o'clock?' I don't know when it started because many of us started long before we were told it

²⁴Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author, 4 October 2004, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

²⁵Ibid.

was okay.²⁶

‘Grand Silence’, that is, a total ban on speaking imposed each night at 9:00 until mass the next morning, and also on certain days of solemnity, was apparently among the rules bent by Superiors.

In the above narratives, Sisters Frances and Gloria attach a moral qualification to their actions and the actions of their fellow sisters. By the latter part of the 1950s, defining what was ‘right’ and what one ‘believed in’, and ‘doing the right thing’, began to precede over centuries old regulations. As morality superseded tradition, and individual decision-making superseded collective legalism, the daily lives of sisters were affected in numerous practical ways.

Superiors, particularly in smaller houses away from the large community Mother house, often neglected to enforce the ‘lights-out’ rules, thereby enabling sisters to mark papers or read late into the night. Sister Suzanne recalls, as a young teacher, having to ‘leave the light on and correct [papers] much later [than ‘lights out],’ and doing so without reprisals.²⁷ Some women tell of Superiors who relaxed the rules around watching television. Not surprisingly, the introduction of television into convents was an issue of great contention in the late 1950s. The Holy Names Sisters’ 1961 *Acts of Chapter* includes a printed insert issued from Rome in 1957 by the Sacred Congregation of the Affairs of Religious Concerning Religious in the Active Life, titled “Radio and Television in Religious Communities.” Among other recommendations, the Sacred Congregation emphasized that television use in all religious communities must be controlled by the Superiors of houses, and

²⁶Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

²⁷Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 15 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

that viewing should be restricted to “broadcasts of daily news or those of an educational or religious nature.”²⁸ The Holy Names’ 1961 *Acts of Chapter* required that a copy of the Sacred Congregation’s report be placed in the community rooms of all convents.²⁹ The minutes of the Ursulines’ 1957 General Chapter allude to this document, reinforcing the requirement that “T.V. would be handled by the Superior similarly to the radio. Permission should be obtained each time that one wishes to see educational programs.”³⁰

Typically, in the early 1960s, sisters were allowed to watch religious or educational programs and the news, in very small doses. Some sisters, however, remember watching television for entertainment purposes, violating what they knew to be the rules. In her early years with the community, Sister Gloria and her peers would sometimes stretch the truth with their Superiors in order to watch entertaining television programs:

There were t.v.s in all our convents but, you know, you couldn’t turn them on. You could watch the news and that was it. But if there was a program on that had to do with what you were teaching, you couldn’t decide, ‘I’m going to watch this program.’ You had to go ask somebody if it was okay to watch the program. So what happened was we would make up stories about how this was going to help me with my teaching when it didn’t. Just in order to be able to watch a program! And I can remember we were watching Perry Como on Saturday night and I can remember one of the nuns going to the Superior and saying, ‘He’s just like a priest,’ and that’s how we would get to watch, because he sang Ave Maria. And so we would go and get her when he was singing Ave Maria so she’d know that he was just like a priest, but if she came in when they were doing something else we’d stand in front of the t.v. so she couldn’t see what we were watching. So, that was kind of childish, when you

²⁸“Radio and Television in Religious Communities: Norms set by the Sacred Congregation of the Affairs of Religious concerning Religious in the active life,” Rome, August 6, 1957. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

²⁹*Acts of the 1962 General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, 1962, p. 21. S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

³⁰*Minutes of the 1957 General Chapter*, p. 54. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario,

think of it. We were grown women!³¹

Some of these acts of defiance may seem trivial - even silly - to us in 2007. Yet, in the face of centuries old rules and regulations, such nascent, grassroots rebellion is significant. Not only does it serve as a telling precursor to reforms that would occur in the coming decade, but such 'unofficial' reforms also demonstrate that the sisters exercised autonomy, self-direction and self-advocacy even before such traits were encouraged. From these oral testimonies we are able to form some important conclusions about the 'unofficial' yet fundamental reform processes in women's religious communities.

First, the sisters' stories indicate that there was a readiness for change. In fact, there was a desire for change evident within the communities sometimes even before communities were ready to talk about change, and long before the institutional Church sanctioned official reforms. This readiness and desire may have been sparked by the intersections of convent culture with secular institutions of postwar Canadian society. Because, as teaching sisters, members of the Ursulines and Holy Names communities spent their workdays in either elementary or secondary school classrooms, or in universities, and because their centuries-old monastic horaria and dress was notably out-of-step with the demands of those environments, perhaps the sisters of the '50s and '60s began to articulate what may have been a slowly percolating desire for change.

Second, the sisters told stories of defiant actions that indicate an awareness of the times. Although Pius XII's calls for adaptations in the 1950s were not specific, and although the Superior Generals were not required to share the details of these papal directives with the sisters in their communities, it seems that at least some sisters had a sense that change was on the horizon. As noted at the beginning of this section, it is difficult to say whether some

³¹Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

sisters in the pre-Vatican II era, apprised of Pius XII's calls for adaptation, perceived that change was imminent and therefore felt justified in using even their limited authority as Superiors of smaller convents to bend what they felt were antiquated and meaningless regulations. The willingness of some sisters to push the boundaries in their thinking and in their actions is, perhaps, indicative of a perception that these changes would eventually be sanctioned. Further, these stories of rebellion reveal that women in the convent were, indeed, a microcosm of women in the larger society. Women's desires for independence, privacy, choice, and freedoms as embodied in the budding secular feminism of the era were sought even by women who lived within convent walls. Although these women would not have described their actions as 'feminist' at the time, some see them this way in retrospect.

Third, the observation that much incipient change occurred at the 'middle-management' level is itself noteworthy. Many of the sisters who initiated 'unofficial' changes were well-educated, professional women whose on-going academic studies and daily interactions with other educators and students informed their decisions. While in certain aspects of their lives these sisters were bound by the restrictions of communal life, they managed to preserve and exert their individualism in their successful attempts at circumventing official regulations. Although the regulations prescribing communal emphasis in language had not yet been officially changed, it seems that some sisters did preserve a sense of individualism and they exercised personal agency despite institutional restrictions intended to prevent such renegade transgressions.

Fourth, the actions of these 'rebel' sisters in the 1950s and '60s foreshadowed the leadership models which developed in the 1970s and '80s. The Superiors who sidestepped

the rules early on would later take on positions of greater authority,³² and their previous experiences would prepare them to facilitate more egalitarian decision-making models typical of women's religious communities from the 1980s to the present.

When considering the above stories and the conclusions which may be drawn from them, a most pressing question arises: *How did it come to pass that these subversive actions were unnoticed, tolerated, or permitted?* A twenty-first century gaze does not afford a view of whether or not the aforementioned behaviours were noticed by the General Superior, or by Superiors of other houses who may have disagreed with their peers' actions. If, in fact, the actions of these dissenting women were observed, were they ignored, and thereby condoned? Most of the women who may have been able to offer such perspective (most notably, the Superior Generals of the Ursuline and Holy Names communities in the 1950s) are no longer living, and their papers do not indicate that specific acts of insubordination were especially problematic at the time. None of the women whose stories are told in the preceding paragraphs reported being censored or reprimanded for their actions, so either their actions went entirely unnoticed or they were ignored by the General Superior and other women in authority within the community.

The only indications that the General Superior and her Council may have had some general concerns about rebellious behaviours at the time they were occurring in the immediate pre-Vatican II years are found in the minutes and the Acts of the communities' respective General Chapters. For example, the Minutes of the Ursuline community's 1957 General Chapter, note that Mother Kathleen, in her delivery of the traditional Superior

³²Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., was Superior General of her community from 1969- 1977. Frances Ryan, O.S.U., served as Superior General from 1977-1985. Gloria Droulliard, S.N.J.M., served as Holy Names Provincial Superior from 1977-1985 and from 1997-2005.

General's Report, included admonitions to Superiors of the smaller convents. She expressed her fears that some Superiors were "not watchful enough and they do not observe the nuns who are getting into bad habits, or they fear to correct them." At the same time, she describes the "spirit in our houses" as "very good", and notes a "uniformity of ideas among our nuns, due to the Superiors' Meetings." Further, she notes, "If the Superiors were not loyal, it would cause much more serious division and disorder than is the case where an individual religious is rebellious."³³

It is impossible to say whether Mother Kathleen is alluding to specific incidents where Superiors were 'not watchful enough', or whether the alleged cases of individual rebellion were the direct results of the 'unofficial' reforms instigated by the Superiors of the smaller convents. Clearly, her remarks are made with the intention of raising awareness of the need for vigilance regarding regulations and conformity, yet she seems to feel that the Superiors to whom she has entrusted the smaller convents are, in fact, 'loyal.'

More general in nature is a statement in the 1961 Holy Names Congregation's *Acts of Chapter*. In reference to the rules and regulations of the community, as recorded in its Constitutions, Book of Customs, and Acts and Recommendations of General Chapters, the following admonition is offered:

Unfortunately, Sisters are inclined to assert their right to a personal interpretation of these precious guides, giving words and expressions a meaning wider or other than that intended, turning them to their own advantage, the way of nature and not of grace, or even endeavoring to find in them a censure of authority. An attitude such as this lays the sincerity of a vocation open to doubt. These somewhat severe remarks apply to a small minority, yet they are charitably deemed advisable. They will incite the larger number of excellent religious to greater zeal in giving good example. These

³³"Superior General's Report to the 8th General Chapter," *Minutes of the 1957 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

religious are the mainstay of the Congregation.³⁴

Implicit in this statement is a recognition on the part of the Superior General and Council that there are some acts of dissension occurring within the community, and that these involve ‘personal interpretation’ of regulations. This acknowledgment is tempered by the qualification that the dissenters are ‘a small minority’ within the congregation, and it is not specifically noted as to whether Superiors or other sisters in positions of authority are among this group. In fact, because this statement arises from a General Chapter, these assertions may be in reference to events in jurisdictions outside the Ontario Province.

It may be that these general admonitions regarding bad habits and personal interpretations of regulations are simply part and parcel of community governance. Yet, although there are no specific incidents mentioned in either the Ursuline or Holy Names directives, it is clear that the leadership of the communities in the late 1950s and early 1960s felt a need to impart such warnings. Evidently, some sisters were asserting a willful individualism in an era where conformity and adherence to regulations continued to be highly valued. Still, these examples offer no specific evidence that the aforementioned ‘unofficial’ reforms were the reason behind these reminders to Superiors of smaller convents.

In order to understand why covert activities which bent the well-defined rules and regulations of convent life were either condoned or ignored by those in power, and in order to gain a full appreciation for their significance to those who numbered among the less powerful, rank-and-file sisters, it is essential to examine women’s personal reflections on the most intimate aspects of change. The remainder of this chapter will examine two broad aspects of reform within religious life, and within the women themselves. It is an attempt to

³⁴*Acts of the 1962 Chapters of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, p. 4. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

get ‘inside’ women’s religious communities, to see how women themselves experienced and perceived the most personal aspects of change, how reform affected their understandings of self and of community, and how such changes affected renewal in spirituality. Examinations of two areas of sisters’ lives - women’s friendships within the convent and spirituality - will offer insights into how changes (both official and unofficial) were rationalized, perceived and negotiated in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. These discussions may also aid the twenty-first century observer in his or her understanding of how women’s individual lives were both oppressed and empowered, curtailed and enriched, by Vatican II-era convent life.

Friendship and Women Religious

Beginning in the Middle Ages, reaching an apex in the Tridentine period, and extending well into the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church has a long history of regulating the lives of women religious, particularly those aspects of their lives involving interpersonal relationships.³⁵ As mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis, cloister walls, grilles, and strict regulations surrounding interactions with seculars were imposed and justified for variety of reasons, such as protecting sisters’ physical safety, providing an environment conducive to prayer and safe-guarding their chastity. Traditional thinking around such regulations emphasized the notion that as ‘Brides of Christ’, women religious were to deny their physical and social desires in order to focus exclusively on the fulfilment of their vowed religious commitment.

Janice Raymond extends and challenges traditional theological and historical

³⁵Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters In Arms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) provides a very detailed and comprehensive historical account of the ways in which women’s religious communities became increasingly subject to ecclesial regulation beginning in the Medieval period. See especially Part III, “The High Middle Ages,” and Part VI, “The Early Modern Era.”

rationales for the regulation of sisters' social interactions by the Church's male hierarchy. In Raymond's estimation, male clerics stood to gain political and economic power from the regulation of women. A prime example of this is found in the Church's dealings with the medieval Beguine communities. At the turn of the thirteenth century, communities of women began to gain popularity and notoriety in Belgium, France, Germany and Northern Italy. Known as the Beguines, these women devoted themselves to the *vita apostolica*, the apostolic life, eschewed marriage, lived either alone or in groups, and devoted themselves to works of charity and devotion to God.³⁶ In addition, and most contentious according to Raymond, the Beguines owned property and managed their own estates and financial affairs.³⁷ The imposition of restrictions, such as the habit, the cloister and episcopal governance, sought not only to protect and sanctify women; such regulations also ensured that valuable landholdings and control over the economies of religious communities would fall under the jurisdiction of male clerics.

McNamara supports such an interpretation, noting that the Beguines "who never took vows of poverty and lived on their personal incomes, always attracted popular suspicion and reproach."³⁸ With urbanization and the rise of communal monasticism in European cities, the *cura mulierum*, or 'the care of women', became a central concern of the Medieval church.³⁹ This extended well into the era of the Counter-Reformation with the Council of Trent's categorical imposition of papal enclosure on all women's religious communities. The

³⁶Mary Malone, *Women and Christianity, Volume II: From 1000 to the Reformation* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2002), 126-7.

³⁷Janice Raymond, *A Passion for Friends* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 84.

³⁸McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 275.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 261. McNamara devotes a chapter of this work to the ecclesial concern with *cura mulierum*. See pages 260 to 288.

ensuing regulations enshrined in the Rules and Constitutions of communities, which set forth rigid prescriptions for silence, modesty and decorum, preempted interpersonal relationships, especially ‘particular friendships’, between and among sisters; this served to further limit women’s collective power and to ensure their compliance to authority. These regulatory strictures remained in place until the reform era of the Second Vatican Council.

An article by Nancy Sylvester, IHM, examining the phenomena of ‘particular friendships’ in her community of Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Sisters bears the somewhat ironic title, “PFs: Persistent Friendships.” This history of friendships in the IHM community spans from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century and, drawing on the work of historian Lillian Faderman, Sylvester attempts to establish rationales for the continuing strict controls on friendship within a community of women religious in the pre-Vatican II period. According to Faderman’s interpretation of women’s friendships in early-twentieth century Western Europe and North America, increased urbanization, opportunities for women in education, women’s greater participation in the workforce, and the emergence of psychological theory which deemed exclusive same-sex relationships disordered or deviant, led to a condemnation and rejection of the ‘romantic friendship’ that had been condoned and encouraged in women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁰ Secular society’s regulation of women’s friendships in the twentieth century, like the

⁴⁰Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981). See especially Chapter 3, “Romantic Friendship and Lesbian Love,” 411-415, for detailed discussion of the factors which contributed to the decline of Romantic Friendship and the social impetus to regulate of women’s friendships in the early twentieth century. Regarding the history of women’s friendships in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, also see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29; also see Lisa Moore, “‘Something More Tender Still than Friendship’: Romantic Friendship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England,” *Feminist Studies* 18 (Fall 1992): 499-520.

Church's regulation of the Beguines centuries earlier, had much to do with the preservation of male power in times of significant social change. Not surprisingly then, Sylvester's analysis of her community's experience leads her to conclude that, like their secular contemporaries, women religious in the early to mid-twentieth century also met with greater regulation of their interpersonal relationships than had their counterparts in the previous century. According to Sylvester, regulations regarding 'particular friendships', or PFs, were enforced especially stringently in the decades immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council.⁴¹

With regard to the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters of the mid-twentieth century, their respective *Constitutions* and *Book of Customs* imposed various regulations intended to limit interpersonal relationships. The strict criteria in pre-Vatican II religious life regarding the observation of silence would, in itself, have hindered the development of friendships.

The Ursuline *Constitutions* include the following instruction regarding silence:

The religious will observe silence at all times, except at recreation and when congé is given by the presiding Officer. No speaking should be done in times of silence except what pertains to their work or offices, and this should be done in a low voice.

They will be particularly careful to observe silence at all times on the stairs and in the corridors within the inclosure. . . .

When they are away from the convent, whether in the schools, travelling, or for any other reason, they should remember that they are under the rule of silence the same as when they are at home. . . .⁴²

⁴¹Nancy Sylvester, "PFs: Persistent Friendships," in *Building Sisterhood: A Feminist History of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997, 181-2.

⁴²*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union*, Ursuline Convent "The Pines", Chatham, Ontario, 1952, art. 19, 20, 21, p. 66. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario. Note that in convent culture, 'congé', or 'leave-taking', refers to the special permission granted by the Superior of the convent to speak at meals on feast days or days other days of celebration.

The Holy Names *Book of Customs* offers similar caveats:

The Sisters shall be silent in act as well as in word. They shall be careful to acquire a noiseless tread in walking and in going up and down stairs, a gentle touch in opening and closing doors, in moving chairs and other articles of furniture, and in washing dishes at table. While in the chapel they shall, as much as possible, refrain from coughing, sneezing, clearing the throat and fidgeting with beads and medals. . . .

At the end of the recreation period a bell shall be rung and talking shall cease promptly. In order to foster the spirit of recollection, prayer, and study . . . there shall be strict silence in the halls, the sacristy, the vestibule of the chapel, the study rooms, and the sleeping apartments.

If the Sisters wish to attain perfection they shall be careful to foster a love for silence. The hours of silence shall be considered a priceless time to be spent in studying, in musing upon subjects for meditation, and in conversing with our Lord.⁴³

As the above excerpts illustrate, very few opportunities for casual socializing were permitted in the course of the daily horarium. Beyond the perfunctory speaking required for the sisters' work and the operation of the house, conversation was curtailed. According to the above prescriptions, silence resulted in spiritual benefits; decreased temporal distractions were thought to lead to improved attitudes toward and increased time spent in study and prayer. Moreover, the regulations regarding silence would certainly have limited the likelihood of close friendships developing between the sisters.

The Ursuline's *Constitutions* address 'particular friendships' specifically. Article 31 cautions sisters against such relationships:

They should carefully watch over the affections of their hearts, and should be especially on their guard against particular friendships, whether these be among themselves, with the pupils, or with persons of the world.⁴⁴

⁴³*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Mother House, Outremont, 1962, art. 118, 199, 122, pg. 15. S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.*

⁴⁴*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union, 1952, art. 31, p. 8. Ursuline Archives, Chatham Ontario.*

Article 32 offers some practical advice for avoiding such ‘affections’:

. . . They should never touch one another except as the Rule allows, and they should be prudently reserved and circumspect in their intercourse with their pupils and friends.⁴⁵

Similarly, the Holy Names *Book of Customs*, in articles 48 and 51, impose the following restrictions on interpersonal relations:

Religious modesty and virginal reserve demand that the Sisters shall recoil from affectation in dress and manner, and from tender, familiar, or impulsive caresses. They shall not be lavish with kisses even with the younger children, and never on the lips.

They shall guard against particular friendships, and shall avoid any interchange of letters that are too sentimental, any conversation that is too frivolous, or any gift-giving that would tend to foster affections that are too human.⁴⁶

The regulations of the Ursuline and the Holy Names sisters share several commonalities. First, and most obviously, is the specific regulation against ‘particular friendships.’ The aforementioned examples articulate an assumption that the sisters will have social contacts - the Ursuline *Constitution* refers specifically to sisters’ ‘friends’, while the Holy Names’ *Customs* indicate that letters, conversations, and gift-giving are part of their lives; but the stipulation against ‘particular,’ or one-to-one, exclusive friendships is explicit. This is further enshrined in regulations which restrict the private time a sister might spend with another sister, even during scheduled ‘recreation’ periods. The Ursuline *Constitutions*, article 31 states:

During recreation, it is well for the religious to associate with the first ones they meet, and for the elder to mingle with the younger; this prevents the same persons from being continually together, and secures by the relations of

⁴⁵Ibid., art. 32, p. 8.

⁴⁶*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, 1962, art. 48, 51, p. 7.

cordial charity a greater union of heart and soul.⁴⁷

The Holy Names *Customs* offers a similar caveat:

Whether the time for recreation be spent indoors or out, the Sisters shall be careful to keep a subdued tone of voice and to avoid loud or immoderate laughter. They shall not wander off in pairs for private conversation, except occasionally, and for a very short time.⁴⁸

Reasoning that particular friendships could be preempted by restricting prolonged, exclusive contact with other sisters, even ‘recreation’ was structured such that women could not normally make choices about the company they kept.

Second, the above regulations recommend self-restraint and self-denial as ways to prevent the development of particular friendships. The Ursulines are admonished to be “prudently reserved and circumspect” in their interactions, while the Holy Names sisters are to guard against behaving in “too human” a manner. Any failure to prevent particular friendships is thereby the fault of the individual sister and her own inability to exercise self control.

Third, and most curious, is the use of the term ‘friends’ in article 32 of the Ursuline *Constitutions*. While ‘particular friendships’ are considered undesirable, it is assumed that sisters will have ‘friends’. Similarly, the Holy Names’ *Customs* dictate that while letters ought not be ‘too sentimental’, conversation ‘too frivolous’, or affections ‘too human’, these overt expressions of friendship are not denied outright. This prompts the questions, ‘*what did friendships between women religious look like in the pre-Vatican II era?*’, and, further, ‘*how were these achieved?*’

Several Ursuline and Holy Names sisters described the experience of living with rigid

⁴⁷*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious*, 1952, art. 10, p. 110.

⁴⁸*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names*, 1962, art. 242, p. 32.

rules regarding silence. The following account by Sister Gloria is particularly useful:

There was a lot of silence in those days. We just talked at certain times in each day, and not always at meals. We had somebody reading spiritual reading during meals. If we had sewing there was spiritual reading during sewing. And when we had classes we weren't supposed to talk then either. But sometimes we did.⁴⁹

Clearly, there were many times in the course of daily living when regulations regarding silence were easily enforced. Sister Mary describes her early years with the community in the mid-1950s and the ways in which the young sisters were kept from talking during assigned tasks:

Now when we were in the novitiate we were apart from the community nuns and we weren't supposed to interact with them. We were supposed to interact with the sisters in charge of us and not have contact with any other sisters in the house . . . One of the jobs we had to do was peel potatoes and scrape the carrots, but there would be great big pots of them, so there would be five or six of us assigned to that. You stood there, and in order to keep us from talking, because we were supposed to be in silence all the time, they would have us saying the rosary, but you couldn't hold your beads. So as you went, to keep track, you would say, "Choir One: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee . . ." and you would say the prayer and everybody would answer, and then you would say, "Choir Two: Hail Mary, full of grace . . ." So for each of the ten you would call it a choir so you could keep track. . . . The sister in charge of that area would come down and oversee that we were working and not fooling around, and then when she would go we'd start chatting and things, and be bad until she came down again, and then we'd smarten up again and settle down. We were still young and a little crazy!⁵⁰

While both Sister Mary and Sister Gloria's experiences indicate that within the convent walls it was possible to control social interaction at least some of the time, Sister Gloria's comments draw attention to the fact that sisters would have had opportunities while at school to circumvent such restrictions and converse with one another. While life within the convent was perhaps more readily regulated, sisters' time spent in classrooms may have provided

⁴⁹Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

⁵⁰Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author.

some time for social interaction. It is clear that, in spite of the strict regulations of the horarium and additional rituals imposed during manual tasks such as peeling vegetables and sewing, women found ways to share in conversation and camaraderie. Sister Mary's qualification that "We were still young and a little crazy!" hints at the notion that perhaps younger, less 'formed' sisters would have engaged in such behaviours more frequently than their older, more mature counterparts. However, the fact that young sisters, who would typically have been in their late teens, sometimes interacted with one another despite being chastised for doing so, indicates that friendships were likely forged early on in religious life and, consequently, may have persisted for decades.

Sister Frances, when asked about convent life in the 1950s, stated:

We weren't allowed to have close friends. That didn't prevent it from happening - I had close friends and formed some very deep friendships, most of which endure to this day.⁵¹

Not only does Sister Frances acknowledge friendships, but she qualifies them as 'close', 'deep', and enduring. Sister Patti (in fact, a close friend of Sister Frances for over forty years), noted of her experience in the 1950s that custom dictated that when leaving the chapel, the sister whom you met at the door was the sister with whom you were to walk to refectory or recreation, depending on the time of day. She recalled, however, that sisters on either side of the chapel would look to see who they might naturally meet as the lines merged and attempt, ever so subtly, to jockey for position in order to "pair up" with their friends.⁵² Yet another Ursuline, Sister Eleanor, in her late teens during her early years with the community in the 1950s, recalled:

⁵¹Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁵²Patricia McLean, O.S.U., interview by author, 27 April 2005, London, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

I made up my own rules about how to keep silence. . . . If there was a greater need and I was supposed to be, say, sweeping the walk, and someone needed someone to talk to, then that was more important. But usually both got done. . . . I think maybe I got into trouble, but I could talk my way out of it!⁵³

Clearly, regulations were circumvented in order that sisters might form and maintain friendships within the community.

Some Holy Names sisters spoke of relationships between sisters and non-religious, wherein affection and friendship were also prohibited. When asked about her own motivation for joining the Holy Names community, Sister Gloria told the following story:

I went to St. Joseph's School in River Canard, and we had the Holy Names Sisters [as teachers]. When I was small - well, I wasn't ever really *small* - I grew real fast and my legs were sore all the time. And we used to walk to school, and it was a good distance. And I'd get to school and I'd be crying because my legs were sore. And my first grade teacher was a nun who was not even five feet high and almost as wide as she was tall. She would put me on her desk and rub my legs. She was a very caring person, as were all the sisters that were there. . . . And I wanted to be a teacher. . . . I think it was the way the sisters were with the students, and that they had the authority of teachers but they were also friends. And then when my mom died, I was fifteen and in high school, and the sisters really took me and my sister under their wings, and that influenced me.⁵⁴

Sister Gloria's experiences of the friendship of sisters played a crucial role in her own decision to enter the Holy Names community.

Perhaps because of her childhood experiences and her understanding that sisters could be 'friends' with non-religious, Sister Gloria noted that as young sisters she and her contemporaries "made fun" of regulations that restricted interaction with seculars. She referred to the practice of "modesty of the eyes" as "silly stuff". She recalled:

Here we were teaching big boys, and we weren't supposed to look men in the eyes? To practice modesty of the eyes? But that just all went by the wayside

⁵³Eleanor Gleeson, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁵⁴Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

after Vatican II, so that people could be *human* instead of - - I don't know what you were supposed to be before that, but it certainly wasn't human!⁵⁵

Even more amusing is Sister Gloria's memory of laughing about a certain mandate issued from the Mother House in Montreal, which came translated from French to English:

In French it made sense, but in English it was 'The sisters shall not have intercourse with seculars on the bus!' (Laughter) So we just made fun of that type of thing - you know, as if anyone would have intercourse on the bus!⁵⁶

Not only did friendships provide the traditional benefits of companionship and support, but they may also have provided a supportive context within which sisters felt free to challenge regulations and practices that they saw as irrelevant or antiquated.

The examples offered in the preceding paragraphs describe the experiences and effects of friendship in the convent in the pre-Vatican II years. The stories of Sisters Gloria, Mary, Frances, Patti and Eleanor indicate that, despite restrictions against particular friendships, meaningful friendships developed and were sustained. Although specific attention was not drawn to the discontinuance of regulations against particular friendship, all reference to restrictions against such relationships is omitted from both the Ursuline and Holy Names regulations by 1967.

Though it was not a common theme, a few sisters remarked that changing attitudes toward friendships required a period of adjustment. For some sisters, especially those who had been in the community for more than a decade before regulations regarding silence and particular friendships were discarded, developing deep friendships was not easy. For example, Sister Mary recalled:

At times, when you were living community life and you were living it in silence, there was also a safeguard. . . . And sometimes I thought it was a lot

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

easier when there was silence and you didn't have all this interaction and . . . sharing. . . . There were an awful lot of demands to share at your 'gut level', and sometimes that was really grueling. And I think there was a stage for me when I found that extremely difficult . . . I think I wasn't ready to put that much out. . . . And then I got really scared and withdrew for a while because I was overwhelmed by it all. I think it was difficult for me at that level.⁵⁷

Sister Mary's very honest appraisal of her own distress at trying to adjusting to her community's relaxation of the rules regarding silence and the adoption of an openness to interpersonal relationships not only reveals that not everyone welcomed such change; it also indicates that perhaps some sisters did, in fact, adhere to and, at some level, appreciate, the traditional proscriptions regarding personal friendships.

Nonetheless, few sisters reported having such anxiety around changes to interpersonal relationships and to convent life generally. Some sisters described such reforms as "a relief"⁵⁸; one sister reflected, "I can remember being freed, feeling free."⁵⁹ Like the preceding sections' discussion of changes in language and incidents of unofficial reform and the ways in which these fostered an increasing sense of individualism among sisters, so too did the changes to regulations prohibiting particular friendships 'free' sisters. In a sense, the aforementioned discussion of the shift from the 'we' to the 'I' comes full circle in this discussion of women's friendship in pre-Vatican II convent culture. The negotiation between collective and individual identities is realized in a specific tension between the "cordial charity" prescribed in pre-Vatican II official regulations and the sisters' desires for genuine, freely chosen friendships. As examined in the previous chapter, these sisters were among those who welcomed opportunities discussed to 'experiment' with new forms of community

⁵⁷Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁵⁸Anne Denomy, O.S.U., interview by author, 26 October 2004, Stratford, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁵⁹Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

living. The shift to small group living served not only to broaden and deepen friendships, but it would also support contemporaneous changes in sisters' spiritualities.

Changing Devotional Practices

Among the Roman Catholic laity there has long existed a spectrum of attitudes, beliefs and devotional practices. Particularly in the contemporary North American context, the far 'right' of this spectrum might be seen as promoting traditionalism in their reverence for the Eucharist, Marian devotion, an inerrant papacy and rigid dogmatism, whereas the far 'left' might be viewed as quite radical in their liberal stances on such controversial topics as a married priesthood, the ordination of women, the use of birth control and the acceptance of homosexuality. Yet millions and millions of Catholics, devout and lapsed, sit somewhere along this spectrum of attitude, belief, and practice. Like the general Catholic population, women religious are also found across this spectrum.

In the course of conducting oral history interviews, I spoke with Ursuline and Holy Names sisters, both on and off the record,⁶⁰ about their faith. Taking up Brouwer's challenge to Canadian historians to examine the "personal, spiritual phenomenon" of women's religious experience,⁶¹ I tried to be particularly alert to comments which indicated that the era of the Second Vatican Council was one not only of exterior transformations but also of interior, spiritual renewal. The sisters did not disappoint and, in the end, I was surprised to find

⁶⁰Often, when women began to talk about their changing attitudes about the Church and the transformations in their faith in the Vatican II era, they were moved to speak about present-day issues, such as the Church's attitudes toward women's ordination, its stance on homosexuality, and the then recent papal election of the conservative Benedict XVI. These conversations usually arose after the recorded interviews had ended, and perhaps this is indicative of a certain degree of self-censure on the parts of sisters whose more liberal views are inconsistent with those of the institutional Church.

⁶¹Brouwer, "Transcending the 'unacknowledged quarantine'," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 3 (Fall 1992), 52.

numerous thematic strands, both conspicuous and subtle, which demonstrated that a rich variety of spiritualities exists in women's religious communities and that this contemporary diversity has its roots in 1960s' reform. Such events as modifications to liturgy, the introduction of modern liturgical music and art, and new opportunities for personal prayer profoundly influenced the devotional practices of women religious in this era.

Along with Roman Catholics around the world, women religious adapted to the substantial reforms to liturgy which were implemented by the Church in the Vatican II-era. *Sacrosantum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Liturgy, dated December, 1963, was the first document issued by the Second Vatican Council, and effects were immediate, far-reaching and highly visible. Like other Catholics of the era, women religious adapted to significant reforms to devotional practices, such as more active participation of the faithful in the rite of the mass, the use of the vernacular in rituals and sacraments, and an increased diversity and cultural representation in sacred music and art.⁶² Consistent with the conciliar mandate that clergy instruct their parishioners in the ways of the new liturgy,⁶³ sisters remembered the experience of transition from the traditional Latin rite to a more participatory celebration of the mass in the vernacular. Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M, recalled:

In the Church, what I loved the most . . . was the way Eucharist was celebrated with the priest facing us. . . . I felt more involved. When I went back to Amherstburg where we had those wonderful priests - Father M_____ And Father R_____, and others - their homilies were wonderful - they spoke our

⁶²Regarding the participation of laity in ritual, see *Sacrosantum Concilium*, especially art. 27, 30, 31; regarding the use of the vernacular, see art. 36; regarding modernization of sacred music and art, see especially art. 116, 119, 120, 123.

⁶³*Sacrosantum Concilium*, art. 19: "With zeal and patience, pastors of souls must promote liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy."

language, and they spoke the word of God.⁶⁴

Similarly, Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M, noted:

[Regarding] the aspect of the language and being able to understand - I think I was very privileged to be in parishes where not only were Vatican II documents being explained, but little sections of the mass were also being explained to the congregation.⁶⁵

At the same time, these rather sudden changes were not always negotiated seamlessly, and some transitions were difficult for some sisters. As much as Sister Suzanne felt 'privileged' to have explanations for liturgical changes, she also remembered that "At first," she, "found it difficult not kneeling at the communion rail."⁶⁶ For religious and non-religious alike changes to adaptations to traditional rites were not easily adopted, and life-long practices, especially those ingrained in childhood, were particularly difficult to break.

Mary Waters, O.S.U., also recalled her uneasiness with such changes:

At first it was really frightening, because I'm always good with what is familiar. . . . I kind of went along with it and began to enjoy it - like mass in English so that you could understand what was being said. I mean, that was kind of exciting. After going to mass for many, many years and all of a sudden being able to listen to it rather than read it was kind of exciting.⁶⁷

The mingling of uneasiness and excitement reveals a tension inherent in the experiences of and attitudes toward spirituality and worship in the period. One sister, Kathleen O'Mara, O.S.U., noted that these tensions sometimes manifested themselves in resistance to reforms:

I remember, from my perspective, it was a very exciting time, because I saw us moving out into a new way of being religious, of being connected with the broader church, of seeing people. . . wanting to be more involved and take

⁶⁴Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 3 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

⁶⁵Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author.

responsibility. . . I also remember it as being a time of resistance as well - resistance to the changes . . in liturgy, changes in community. Resistance was mixed up in the whole renewal which, I think, was quite exciting at the time.⁶⁸

Some sisters reported being enthusiastic about reform and the opportunities it afforded them to participate in new ministries. Claire St. Pierre, O.S.U., saw in liturgical reforms the possibility to be much more than a passive observer of change:

For me, with my personality, I was excited. I like change. . . . I never was upset. I always found some challenge in part of it, even if I couldn't understand the whole of the change, there was always some part of it that could provide excitement. . . . I went into the music ministry with children, and I went into the clown masses and all the different ways of getting kids involved in liturgy, in Church life. I tried everything. . .⁶⁹

The 'excitement' Sister Claire felt in her participation in 'clown masses' and in music ministry for children is indicative of the spirit of the day.

While some sisters were more eager than others to engage liturgical reforms, the general interest of the sisters and their sense of excitement at the changes in liturgy is evident in the following recollections:

I loved what came out of Vatican II - the image of the Church as the People of God, the fact that the laity had to be involved, this whole idea that . . . religious or priests are no better than anyone else. . . . I liked the liturgical changes - I liked having the mass in the language you could understand. And I liked having the priest face the people.⁷⁰

The whole theology that was emerging from the Second Vatican Council was much more meaningful than 'you will believe everything I tell you to believe and you will think what I tell you to think.' . . . I found it very exciting, very challenging, and it engaged me in new ways of praying, new ways of understanding, new ways of knowing God, new ways of knowing one

⁶⁸Kathleen O'Mara, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁶⁹Claire St. Pierre, O.S.U., interview by author, 15 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁷⁰Maureen Hussey, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

another.⁷¹

Both Sister Maureen and Sister Frances express that a sense of engagement or belonging grew out of liturgical reform. Such changes as the use of the vernacular in rituals and the priest facing the people were appealing not only aesthetically or socially, but they affected sisters on a personal level. Sister Maureen noted that such changes promoted a sense of egalitarianism, while Sister Frances was excited about the possibilities inherent in such changes for ‘new ways’ of praying and of experiencing the transcendent.

One key aspect of change in liturgy that had deep and abiding personal affects on sisters was the change in musical style. Several sisters mentioned the influence of music on their spiritualities even before the Vatican II years. Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U., when asked about her years with the community in the early 1950s, noted:

One thing that was pretty important in those years was the choir here, so I certainly learned something about Gregorian chant. We had really expert teaching on that.⁷²

The importance of music in the lives of women religious continued into the 1960s and ’70s, and the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters, like sisters throughout North America, experienced what have been a dramatic change in musical style. Rebecca Sullivan devotes a chapter of her *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism and American Postwar Popular Culture* to the discussion of the popularity of folk music within American Catholicism generally, and convent culture specifically, and the way in which such performers as The Singing Sisters of St. Mary’s and iconic figures like The Singing Nun influenced the era. She notes that “the image of singing nuns became a signifier of new forms of piety and forged a link early in the sixties between

⁷¹Frances Ryan, O.S.U, interview by author.

⁷²Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U., interview by author.

the burgeoning counterculture and the renewal of the religious life.”⁷³

Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters identified the influence of folk music and the introduction of modern liturgical music as among the most significant changes to worship and spirituality in the period. Sheila McKinley, O.S.U., who entered the community in the early 1960s, felt more “involved” in ritual with the introduction of folk music into liturgy:

What sticks most strongly in my mind was that the music was singable. . . . I came out of the folk era . . . I grew up with Peter, Paul & Mary and Bob Dylan and that kind of stuff. And several of the novices played guitars and played traditional folk music and the new stuff that was coming out, and what made a really big impression on me was in the late sixties and early seventies a lot of folk music came out that you could use in liturgical celebrations - and we learned it all. We learned Carey Landrey, and Ray Rupp, and the St. Louis Jesuits, and the Damians . . . And the music was something that really touched me. And what it said to me was that the liturgies were more accessible to everybody. . . . It was a neat thing because you really could be involved in the liturgy.⁷⁴

Similarly, Sister Suzanne recalled her attraction to the folk music written expressly for liturgy in the 1960s:

I remember the music of Joe Wise, for example, who was a father, who sang with his children, who sang with his wife. And this was the beginning of the laity taking on leadership and sharing their giftedness. And for me, as a woman religious, I was so happy that this was the ordinary people sharing the gifts that they’d always had but that had not always been accepted.⁷⁵

As young women like Sheila, born in 1948 in the initial years of the baby boom, entered the community in the mid-1960s, they brought an awareness of and appreciation for North American folk music, highly influential in youth culture in the period. Owrarn describes folk

⁷³Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 157.

⁷⁴Sheila McKinley, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁷⁵Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

music as “an adult music form, but one with a pedigree of protest and integrity.”⁷⁶ Convent culture was amenable to the folk trend, and at the same time as the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary were topping the pop music charts, the folk music of liturgical composers like Joe Wise, Ray Repp and Carey Landrey, most of them American, became widely used in Canadian Churches and schools, and the sisters became increasingly familiar with and enamored of the style. Sister Suzanne, who had entered the Holy Names community in 1955 and therefore had not been exposed to 1960s folk music prior to entry, found that not only was the music gratifying to listen to and sing, but the fact that it represented greater participation of the laity, of ‘ordinary people’, in liturgy was personally fulfilling. She could, in a performer like Joe Wise, see possibilities for non-clergy, like herself, in a renewed and vibrant Church.

The sisters’ increased connection to and participation in the rituals of the Church and their involvement in the new folk music and other creative ministries was accompanied by new attitudes toward and experiences of personal prayer. In the pre-Vatican II era, communities’ rigid horaria ensured that women religious would attend mass daily, and that they would also spend set amounts of time in communal prayer and personal prayer and meditation each day. Further, certain events in the Church calendar were marked by specially prescribed observances and prayers. The feast days of the saints, particularly those feast days associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as the community feast days and saints days were afforded particular reverence and ritual.⁷⁷ Prayer was associated with

⁷⁶Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 189.

⁷⁷Although practices are no longer so rigidly prescribed, to this day in the Ursuline community the Feasts of St. Ursula and of Angela Merici are occasions for special celebration, where the Feasts of the Holy Family, the Immaculate Conception

prescribed rhythms and routines, and was to be approached with a sense of purpose. One specific example concerns the Holy Names communities' prescriptions for praying the rosary:

Every day the Sisters shall say the beads, meditating successively on the mysteries of the rosary: Monday and Thursday, the joyful mysteries; Tuesday and Friday, the sorrowful mysteries; Wednesday and Saturday, the glorious mysteries. The joyful mysteries shall be considered on Sundays during Advent and Christmas time; the sorrowful mysteries on the Sundays of Lent; the glorious mysteries on the remaining Sundays of the year. Vocal and mental prayer shall be united to make the rosary an effective weapon against the devil and a means truly helpful toward acquiring union with God.⁷⁸

Additionally, in order to inculcate particular spiritual virtues, such as the attitude of repentance associated with Lent, special acts of mortification were required. For example, the Ursuline Sisters were to observe the following practice as part of their Holy Week devotions:

On Good Friday the religious will dine on the floor, ranged along the tables. The dinner will consist of bread, soup of peas or beans, cod-fish, vegetables, cooked prunes, or similar dishes.⁷⁹

The Good Friday observance of the Holy Names Sisters is equally interesting:

On Good Friday the superior shall perform some special act of humility either in the community or in the refectory. For example, she may ask pardon of the Sisters for her shortcomings, and as a penance kiss the feet of twelve of them. While the superior humbles herself, all the Sisters shall stand; each Sister whose feet she kisses shall respectfully incline.⁸⁰

These are just a few of the ascetic practices prescribed by traditional convent culture and, as

and the Presentation of Jesus are of days of special significance to the Holy Names community.

⁷⁸Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names, 1962 art. 90, p. 12.

⁷⁹*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious*, 1952, art. 14, pg. 47.

⁸⁰*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names*, art. 145, p. 19.

unusual as such observances may appear to outsiders, such rituals were an integral part of the traditional spirituality of religious communities until the 1960s. Approached with a prayerful attitude, such rituals helped to create a uniform devotion and prayer life among sisters.

In the same way that the era's liturgical changes opened new doors to women religious, so too did the 1960s' impetus to reform lead to new attitudes toward and experiences of personal and communal prayer and devotion. Rigid prescriptions regarding observances and traditional devotional and ascetic practices would be replaced with more modern, self-directed forms of prayer. As discussed in the previous chapter, experimentation was encouraged in the area of community living in both the Holy Names and the Ursuline communities, and these new forms of community living served to support innovations in spiritual practices. As increasing numbers of sisters began to live in smaller groups, either within the larger convent or in separate houses, the regulations governing the routines and time allotments for daily prayer were relaxed. Small community living provided opportunities for groups of sisters to pray together and to direct their own prayer and spiritual reading. Some Ursuline sisters report that their involvements in small community living were among the most important experiences of their lives during this period, and they stressed that "the freedom for the setting of times for our own prayer,"⁸¹ and the option to "pray whenever I feel like it"⁸² made appreciable changes to their spiritual lives, affording them greater autonomy with regard to the time, place and emphasis of personal prayer.

This transition was not always an even or gradual one, it seems, particularly for the Holy Names Sisters. Sister Maureen told the following about her own experiences with

⁸¹Patricia Anne Turner, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁸²Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., interview by author.

prayer and small group living in the mid-1960s:

We wanted to pray on our own. We used to have our meditation topic we read every day, and you all prayed on the same thing. And at spiritual reading we came together and read out of the same book. And yet, really, we were all at different places, and so sometimes we might have needed something else. . . . So we got experimenting with some of that. And that went well. We loved it. We were very happy doing all this. We thought it was great. Then someone in office came from Montreal and spent time with us and happened to write back and say what we were doing, and that got squashed and we had to stop what we were doing temporarily.⁸³

Within a year of this setback, however, small group living was again attempted by sisters in the Holy Names community, and was met with no resistance.

Despite small setbacks, the changes to communities regulations served to lessen strict communal observances and to support and encourage a focus on personal spirituality and prayer. The *Summary* of the Holy Names Sisters' 1967 General Chapter overrides all previous detailed prescriptions regarding prayer and ritual observances. It states that "The prayer life of each sister is an expression of her inner personal, relation to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit." Simple 'recommendations' are provided for sisters in order to assist them in the nurturing of this relationship with God:

- - That the Eucharistic Sacrifice be the heart of the prayer life of each sister
- - That Lauds and Vespers in common be the morning and evening prayer of the Community
- - That the sisters be personally responsible for forty-five minutes of mental prayer each day, ordinarily divided between morning and evening
- - That spiritual reading be a half hour, or at least a quarter of an hour, daily .
- ..
- - That a visit to the Blessed Sacrament be daily, at a time favorable to each sister
- - That the sisters examine their conscience, twice, daily⁸⁴

⁸³Maureen Hussey, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

⁸⁴*Acts of the 1967 General Chapter, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

While the leadership of the Holy Names community continued to provide direction for the sisters' prayer, by 1967 these were articulated as 'recommendations'. By the 1971 General Chapter these recommendations were revised and further generalized, permitting greater freedom and choice in the areas of communal and individual prayer. The Chapter moved :

THAT each local community daily give expression to the presence of that community to God and to each other by an ecclesial prayer centered on the Word of God.

THAT the local community encourage development of various forms of communal prayer expressive of the life the group shares.

THAT in each local community the sisters create an atmosphere favorable to growth in personal prayer, which is one's unique response to Christ. . . .

THAT each sister choose the time and the form which best favor(s) her individual prayer; that she respect the personal prayer choices of her sisters.

THAT the sisters give to mental prayer and to spiritual reading sufficient time to lead them towards a closer union with Christ . . .

THAT a certain rhythm of weekly prayer supply a need for lack of time for daily prayer.⁸⁵

Between 1967 and 1971 a discontinuing of time requirements is evident, and the emphasis on personal choice supports the sisters' reports that prayer became more personal and individualized.

Like the Holy Names' sisters, the Ursuline community's regulations regarding prayer changed in the same period. As early as their 1963 General Chapter, the Ursulines began a gradual move toward more individual choice regarding prayer with the decisions that "the afternoon meditation may be made anywhere and at the time most convenient for the individual" and that the weekly requirements for spiritual reading of 1¾ hours per week may be "arranged according to the schedule of the individual."⁸⁶ Changes and modifications to

⁸⁵*Acts of the 1971 General Chapter of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, p. 5-6. S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

⁸⁶*Minutes of the 1963 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

regulations governing community prayer were gradual over the decade, such that at the 1973 Chapter it was moved “that where circumstances make it possible, our convents will be open to people who need time in a community atmosphere for retreat, renewal, rest, etc.” Not only had the Ursulines ceased to impose regulations regarding devotional practice on themselves, but they extended their new emphasis on retreat, renewal and rest to the public.

One interesting result of the elimination of rigid institutional requirements regarding prayer was the establishment of a House of Prayer at the Ursulines’ Villa Angela Convent in Tilbury, Ontario in 1971. This served as a place for the Ursuline Sisters, women from other religious communities and lay women to come, either singly or in small groups, for one-day to one-week retreats. The annals of the local community report that the retreats were used by the Ursulines as ways through which to come to full appreciation of and understanding of change, or what might be referred to ‘process of discernment’ around certain reforms. For example, a 1972 entry notes the topic for one particular retreat, and the outcome of the prayer experience:

The topic of communal discernment was ‘Should every Ursuline of the Chatham Union, who has the opportunity to attend the upcoming Chapter as an observer, be permitted to do so?’
After prayerfully looking at the reasons for and against this question, the delegates decided in favour of it.⁸⁷

This example indicates that not only were the changes in sisters’ prayer lives manifestations of a shift to greater individualism and choice on the part of women religious, but prayer also served to support a new, apostolic community identity which favoured wider participation among members.

Conclusion

⁸⁷*Annals of the Villa Angela Convent, Tilbury, Ontario*, vol. III, 1971-1972, December 6, 1972, p. 10. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

The preceding examination of changes to the regulations governing convent life and the significant transformations in sisters' friendships and devotional practices was initiated with the hope of understanding how change was experienced by sisters, and how, in some circumstances, unofficial change preceded official reforms. As noted in the preceding discussions, both official and unofficial changes had numerous and extensive consequences for the lives of the women in Ursuline and Holy Names communities.

Admittedly, the tone in the preceding sections is a positive one. It seems, from the oral narratives of the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters, that most reforms, even those which required some adjustment, were, on the whole, welcomed and successfully assimilated. This likely has much to do with the fact that, at least with regard to changes which affected sisters most personally (such as those to regulations regarding friendship and devotional practices) sisters had some control over the direction and scope of reforms. Whether negotiated via official community procedures, like General Chapter deliberations or experimentation committees, or approached surreptitiously via 'unofficial' channels, having a sense self-direction and self-determination aided in community members' positive responses to change. Four general conclusions can be drawn regarding the 'inside stories' of unofficial change.

First, each sister, and each community, experienced changes in the areas of friendship and devotion somewhat differently. Though there are commonalities among experiences, it is clear that some sisters adhered closely to regulations, such as those prohibiting particular friendships, while others circumvented such restrictions. While some sisters eagerly welcomed changes to liturgy and prayer, others had some difficulty adjusting to these reforms. The variability among sisters' impressions and experiences indicates that change did not always happen in an ordered, prescribed manner. Further, this speaks to the significance of the "we" to "I" shift in the period, and the fact that an increased sense of

individualism had appreciable bearing on the process of reform.

Second, while top-down institutional legislation (either from Rome or from the Superior General of the community) influenced sisters' general approaches to change, in areas such as interpersonal relationships change sometimes happened from within the community as a whole, at the grassroots level. Interior changes - changes in beliefs, attitudes and morality - tended to precede changes to rules, customs, and regulations, especially in areas that affected sisters personally, like friendship and devotion.

Third, the readiness for change and the eagerness with which changes were adopted by most sisters indicate that sisters themselves had changed long before external reforms were implemented.. It would seem that 'unofficial' reforms initiated by a few superiors in the 1950s and 60s were supported by less observable inner transformations within the rank-and-file sisters. The women who reported having meaningful friendships despite prohibitions against PFs, and who saw the potential for a spiritual life that pushed the boundaries of traditionalism were, perhaps, the fertile ground within which the seeds of 'unofficial' reforms were planted. This helps to explain how and why 'unofficial' reforms were condoned and accepted, despite the strict institutional regulation of behaviours.

Fourth, friendship and devotional practice were not merely two areas which underwent change, but they were also key factors in the lives of women religious which helped to support other changes. Through surreptitious friendships, sisters found mutual support for their beliefs and actions. It is unlikely that women would have pushed the boundaries of convent legalism and risked the condemnation and discipline of their Superior Generals if they had not had some sort of social support undergirding their actions. Prayer and worship, both individual and communal, provided sustenance for sisters both before and after reforms. The excitement and eagerness which accompanied changes to liturgy, and the

meaning which sisters seem to have found therein, indicates that sisters were more than ready to move to new forms of prayer and devotion and that perhaps inner transformations had already occurred, underpinning and supporting changes as they unfolded.

In order to further an examination of the inner lives of women religious, the chapter which follows examines the psychological implications of the intersections between convent culture and changing ideas about women in the conciliar period. It is necessary to probe the meanings implicit in the relationships between the lives of women religious and the lives of women in secular society in the 1960s to fully understand the factors which influenced reform in women's religious communities in the period. It is, in fact, essential that historians recognize the connections between the histories of lay women and women religious. As Danylewicz has argued, failure to do so "negate[s] the possibility of religious women having a history that is linked not only to the fate of the Church hierarchy, but one that is distinct from it, taking its shape in the larger context of women's culture and work."⁸⁸

In essence, this study will now move from a discussion of changes to friendship and devotion within community (already very personal aspects of sisters' lives), to an even more intimate look at the ideas, themes and emotions associated with changes to self-perception and spirituality. As we shall see in the chapters which follow, historical examinations of sisters' changing ideas about women in the larger society, their shifting perceptions of themselves as women, and the ways in which these notions were supported by changes in spirituality come together to afford a unique 'insider' view on the affects of reform.

⁸⁸Marta Danylewicz, *Taking the Veil* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 159.

CHAPTER THREE

LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS: INTERSECTIONS, ANXIETIES AND IDENTITY 1957 - 1969

When Mother Dominica, or ‘The D’ as she is affectionately called by some sisters in her community, entered the conference room for our interview,¹ I was not optimistic. Born in 1916, she was among the oldest sisters in the oral history project. Her rheumy gaze, further obscured by thick glasses with tinted lenses, distanced her, and I had a difficult time making eye contact. She was brief, initially, with her responses, perhaps uneasy with the tape recorder. Yet, one short afternoon, and one *long* story later, I came to know the life story of a woman whose now aged countenance belies an adventurous and stalwart spirit. I also came to see that pre-Vatican II religious life - as restrictive and routine as it appears - sometimes had telling intersections with the secular world.

Dominica Dietrich, daughter of Noah and Christina, was born in Dashwood, Ontario, during the Great War. A farming family, the Dietrichs valued hard work, and they were “very Church-going people,” in Dominica’s estimation. Dominica attended local schools through tenth grade, then went to work on the family farm. “I always told people I preferred milking cows to washing dishes,” she recalled, and she reminisced of all that she learned on the farm, knowledge foreign to “city kids.” When a cousin announced her plans to attend boarding school in Chatham, Ontario, Dominica, who wanted to finish her education, went along to study at the Ursuline-run school, known as ‘The Pines.’ A year later, in 1934,

¹The biographical information and my own reflections in the paragraphs which follow are derived from an interview with Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November, 2001, Chatham Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

Dominica entered the Ursuline community.

Dominica knew that Ursulines were teachers, so she fully expected that when she was finished high school she would go on to Normal School to prepare for a career in education. Much to her surprise, when the slips of paper announcing assignments for the coming school year were distributed, hers read “B.Sc., University of Toronto.”

Seven decades later, Dominica recalled, “I had never seen a train or been on one before, and they put me on this train to go to Toronto to university. That was quite an experience!” And this was just the beginning of her adventures as a female student at the University of Toronto in the 1930s and ’40s.

Her stories about her student years are unique, and she takes pleasure in telling them. Smiling, she shared the following anecdote:

We wore long habits and robes, and you know what most universities are like, the buildings are way apart. And here we were running from one building to the other with all these clothes wrapped around us, in snowstorms and everything. One of the interesting things I remember is that our class had to meet at the Biology Building way on the far side of the campus, and we had ten minutes to change classes. We had to be up on Bloor and we had to cross Avenue Road to get there. . . . Well, we went through the park, and I was at the head of them - I was dressed in these long robes, and all the traffic stopped for me and the whole class followed me across! [Laughter] That was one of the things I was able to do, to get across the street!

(What Dominica neglects to mention is that she is over six feet tall, and in full habit would have been quite an imposing presence on Avenue Road!)

Dominica stayed at the University of Toronto for a total of six years, in which time she completed a science degree, an internship in dietetics at St. Michael’s Hospital, and a Master’s degree. During those years, she observed the effects of the war on the city, and their unique impact on her own comforts:

In those days the streetcars were packed - everybody was going to the factories to work - and you might get in and the rest of your habit was hanging out and the doors would be shut. It was very awkward!

She remembers the end of the war with clarity:

I was downtown at the university when peace was declared in 1945. And we knew everything was going to stop - streetcars and everything. I ran, I caught a streetcar, and I got home, but after that everything was dead still for the rest of the day. Nothing moved.

After earning her Master's degree, Dominica founded the Home Economics Program at Brescia College, University of Western Ontario, where she taught until 1959. She also served terms as Principal of the College, and as Superior of the Brescia convent. In 1969 she became General Superior of the Ursuline community, entering leadership at a tumultuous and revolutionary time in history, for women religious as well as for women in secular society.

The preceding account includes selections from my interview with Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., with an emphasis on her recollections about the 1930s and '40s. Although the focus of this thesis is the events and experiences of reform and renewal in the decades immediately surrounding the Second Vatican Council, Dominica's early life is of interest as it reveals much about the abiding intersections of women's lives with the public realm. Her story demonstrates that some women religious in the pre-Vatican II era, like some women in secular society in the same period, had experiences that defied the public/private divide, even in the years between the so-called first and second waves of feminism. Dominica's somewhat atypical experiences as a young sister indicate that women's religious communities, though set apart from the world by cloisters, Rules, and habits, did, in fact, have interactions with modern educational, political and social events, even in the 1930s and '40s. Although sheltered by the physical and regulatory restrictions of convent life, Canadian women religious of the twentieth century, like their secular counterparts, took advantage of increased opportunities for women in education, they observed the effects of urbanization, and they were challenged to consider the consequences of war on daily living.

Just as intersections between the lives of women religious and secular women occurred in earlier decades, they also occurred in the revolutionary 1960s and '70s. We cannot, therefore, consider ecclesial initiatives to be the sole impetus for reform and renewal in Canadian women's religious communities in this period. As secular women's lives changed during the era of the second-wave women's movement, so too were the lives of women religious affected by changes in attitudes and opportunities in the world outside the convent. In keeping with the 'internal' perspective adopted in this study, the more material, day-to-day interactions between lay and religious women - those exchanges in schools and at church or community events which would have occurred with increasing frequency in the conciliar and post-conciliar period - will not be examined directly. Rather, these will be subsumed within an in-depth historical inquiry into sisters' changing attitudes and ideas about Canadian women in the period and how these shaped sisters' self-perceptions and individual and communal identities.

Getting 'inside' the experiences and attitudes of historical actors is no easy task; in fact, particularly in cultures which are highly regulated and censored, the answers to some historical questions can be quite elusive. It is one thing to inquire as to what sisters *did* and *thought* during a period of significant change, and another to delve into the psychological and spiritual facets of their experience. In the case of women religious in the pre-conciliar and conciliar eras, questions abound regarding more intimate and personal aspects of reform: *What were sisters' feelings about dramatic changes in their appearance, increased freedoms to make their own decisions, and the rapidly changing nature of religious life? What were the aspects of change which provoked the deepest anxieties. . . and the greatest joys? How did sisters' views of themselves - their bodies, their appearances, and their public personas - change as a result of reforms to religious life?* In order to move beyond what sisters *thought*

about and *experienced*, and to begin to understand their *feelings, worries, fears*, and even their *unconscious concerns* regarding changes which affected them most personally, this chapter will continue to explore the oral narratives of the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters, but it will do so in relation to an analysis of convent discourses about modern, young, secular women. While the primary aim of such analysis will be to offer meaningful conjecture regarding the inner lives of women religious in the 1950s and 1960s, a secondary outcome of such inquiry is that it will also expose and examine a little-explored context in which girls and young women were constructed and discussed in postwar Canada.

Examining particular discourses about girls and women from convent archives enables the historian to probe further inside the sisters' experiences of change, their shifting self-understandings and the sometimes anxiety-ridden negotiation between religious life and 1960s' secular women's culture. Such analysis will demonstrate that, as a homosocial institution on the cusp of reform in the 1950s, absorbed in change in the 1960s, and adjusting to new ways of living by the early 1970s, convent culture's discourses about young women reveal much about its membership, their anxieties about change and shifting understandings of gender. Before engaging such analysis, however, a brief discussion of the dominant ideologies regarding gender and religion in postwar Canada and the intersection of these ideologies with convent culture in the period is warranted.

Women, Gender Roles and Religion in Postwar Canada

A discussion of changing attitudes and ideas about women in the postwar context, particularly as this theme intersects with religiosity, must begin with an acknowledgement of the configuration of gender roles unique to the period. Throughout the postwar period, changes in prescribed gender roles would have significant bearing on how women religious came to view themselves and the world during times when reforms to traditional convent life

were, at first, imminent and anticipated and, later, experienced and internalized.

Doug Owsram, in his appraisal of 1950s' family life in Canada, claims "the cult of domesticity was a cult of orthodoxy."² With an influx of men returning from war and reclaiming their places in the working world, and many women returning to their 'rightful' roles as wives and mothers within the home, traditionally ordained public/private boundaries were reestablished and deemed inviolable.³ This return to 'normalcy' was not without its tensions, and as Canadian historians analysing gender ideologies in the 1950s have demonstrated, "during the postwar years there was a great deal of anxiety over proper gender roles for women and men."⁴ In this period of restoration, challenges to the gender roles prescribed within the structure of the traditional middle-class family were tantamount to heresy, and social institutions would play key roles in the moral regulation of men and women. Psychology, education, medicine and religion had significant influence on the proper 'gendering' of Canadians in the 1950s and, as will become evident later in this Chapter, the concerns of these institutions were often overlapping and intersecting.

As an institution whose power rested in the hands of an exclusively male hierarchy,

²Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 253.

³Ruth Roach Pierson notes that postwar restrictions on women's employment and inducements to return to the home had marked effects, confirmed by statistical trends: "Women's participation in the paid workforce, which had risen from 24.4 per cent in 1939 to a high of 33.5 per cent in 1944, began to slide in 1945 and then, in 1946, to plummet. It reached its post-war nadir of 23.6 per cent in 1954 and would not climb back to its 1945 level until 1966." Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 215.

⁴Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 53. Also see Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

and whose sustenance relied on the membership of women,⁵ the Roman Catholic Church, like many other mainstream Christian churches, had a vested interest in the appropriate gendering of its members. The tasks of successfully maintaining the ranks of a sacrosanct male priesthood, ensuring adequate numbers among the battalions of women religious dedicated to selflessly serve in Catholic schools and hospitals, and, just as importantly, guaranteeing that church pews were filled on Sunday morning had, in and of their nature, as much to do with gender, family and sexuality as with faith. In postwar Canada, these functions were accomplished; according to sociologist Reginald Bibby, some 60% of Canadians attended Church on a weekly basis in the immediate postwar era.

During the 1950s Catholic attendance was very high, Protestant groups like the United Church were expanding, and the future looked bright. In early 1955, Gallup found that 68% felt that ‘religion as a whole is becoming a greater influence in Canadian life.’⁶

As Doug Owrarn and others have argued, an increase in Church attendance in the 1950s had more to do with “baby boom and middle-class sensibilities” than with religious commitment, and, in large part, Canadians of the postwar years saw religion as “the ultimate formal organization by which societal values could be transmitted to a new generation.”⁷ Postwar domestic life, with its traditional gender roles, took its cues from mainstream religion, itself a highly gendered institution. Further, according to Owrarn, the reciprocal phenomenon was

⁵Recall Ann Braude’s contention that “where women are present, religion flourishes, where they are absent, it does not.” Ann Braude, “Women’s History Is American Religious History,” *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, T. Tweed, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 92.

⁶Reginald W. Bibby, *The Bibby Report* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995), 134. For further sociological data and interpretation regarding postwar trends in Church attendance and religious belief in Canada, see Bibby’s extended discussion, p. 123-138.

⁷Owrarn, *Born at the Right Time*, 106.

also true: “Mainstream religion, both Catholic and Protestant, mirrored the domesticity of the age,”⁸ promoting traditional, conservative values.

So what, then, was the place of women religious in postwar Canadian culture, relative to the dominant separate spheres ideology and rigidly defined gender-roles which so affected the lives of middle-class Canadians? By all accounts, many women religious, including the Chatham Ursulines and the Holy Names Sisters of the Ontario Province, despite their vows of poverty which precluded personal ownership of goods or property, lived a middle-class existence.⁹ Many came from middle-class families;¹⁰ most sisters were university educated and, in the case of the Ursulines and Holy Names, were employed as teachers, instructing predominantly middle-class girls, often in their own private high schools and women’s colleges.

In many ways, sisters’ lives in the 1950s paralleled those of their secular counterparts, the middle-class wives and mothers of the Canadian suburbs. As *Brides of Christ*, sisters were relegated to the ‘home’ of convent and cloister and, like 1950s’ middle-

⁸*Ibid*, 107-108.

⁹Consistent with the customary use of the term in postwar English Canada, a very broad definition of ‘middle class’ is applied here. As Veronica Strong-Boag notes, the popular press of the era “assumed that post-war prosperity had vastly enlarged the middle class to include the majority of Canadians, excluding only a minority of the very poor and/or those engaged in low-paid blue collar and manual labour employments.” Veronica Strong-Boag, “Canada’s Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 29, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 6.

¹⁰Most sisters whose oral histories were documented for this study came from what might be considered ‘middle-class’ homes. Their fathers included a pharmacist, a manager of a municipal water commission, a CNR station agent, a morse code stenographer, a banker, a book-keeper, a few small business owners, a few farmers and a few factory workers. Four of the sisters noted that their mothers had been teachers before marrying and having children; of these two resumed teaching when their children were ‘older.’

class wives who were expected to put the needs of husbands and families ahead of their own, sisters selflessly dedicated their lives and labours to the service of the male-run institutional Church and to the benefit of the children in their care. It was not only the cloister which removed sisters from the world in the pre-conciliar period, but, in many cases, the limited experiences of the women before entering the convent also made them suited to the shelter of the private sphere. In fact, the majority of sisters in communities in the 1950s entered religious life either while in senior high school or immediately thereafter. Most had attended Catholic schools run by sisters, either as day students or as boarders. Many women religious, especially those who had attended boarding schools, would have had little experience in the 'real' world, relegated for much of their lives to the private spheres of girls' dormitories and convents. In many ways, the life of the middle-class sister was even more sheltered and domesticated than that of her secular peers.

At the same time, however, woman religious of the 1950s had one foot in the public sphere. Convent life afforded sisters freedom from traditional family life, and from the domestic demands of husbands and child-rearing. The vast majority of sisters were educated career women, and many held positions of authority as, in the case of teaching sisters, school principals and department heads at high schools and universities. Of course, although sisters might advance to positions of responsibility in their places of work, or to positions of authority within their communities (as Superiors, for example), within the ranks of the institutional Church a 'stained-glass ceiling' restricted them from the ranks of the ordained hierarchy.¹¹ Still, as religious they held a certain degree of prestige in the larger community

¹¹This is not to say that women religious were actively seeking full participation in the ordained priesthood in the conciliar period. As Jo Ann McNamara notes, the women's ordination movement began in earnest in the later 1970s, with Roman Catholic women, lay and religious, taking their cue from Jewish and Protestant women who were "beginning to make inroads into the sacred precincts of

by virtue of their status and title.

Neither wholly compliant with the prescribed roles for women in the private realm of home and family, nor entirely free and autonomous in the public realm, women religious in the pre-conciliar period represented dependence and independence, submission and authority. In her discussion of the image of the nun in the postwar era, Rebecca Sullivan points to the fact that while sisters' position of ambiguity along the private/public divide might be viewed as potentially incendiary, in reality there was little cause for alarm:

In the wide gulf between the sexually liberated single girl and the loving and lovable domestic goddess, nuns were a third option that fired up dreams of feminine independence while smothering any possibility that the flames might get out of control.¹²

It is important to remember, however, that while the role of women religious in the postwar era was a seemingly innocuous way in which women might traverse the public/private realms, sisters were not immune to changes in gender ideologies in the larger society, nor were they free from the anxieties which often accompany such changes.

A study such as this one, which purports to provide a glimpse 'inside' the process of change in women's religious communities in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council, must acknowledge the effects of changes in gender roles in Canadian society in the period. As the winds of change began to blow in the 1950s with the Vatican's pre-conciliar recommendations regarding adaptations to convent life, they did so within the atmosphere of the postwar era with its aggrandisement of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. As the conservatism of the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, traditional gender roles underwent

their respective religions." Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 632.

¹²Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 12.

yet further redefinition, particularly in the later '60s as the influence of second-wave feminism permeated society and its institutions. At the same time, the Church was changing - from bastion of tradition and institutional power in the 1950s to an organization seeking to reform itself to suit the modern world in the 1960s. These simultaneous trends would have significant impact on women religious. In the section which follows, sisters' changing self-understandings, and the implications of these changes in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council, will be explored.

Discourses on Girls and Women

In convent records from the 1950s and '60s there is little material evidence available from which to construct an account of how women religious themselves defined 'woman' or 'womanhood.' There are, however, countless examples of externally imposed prescriptions and regulations designed to promote attitudes and behaviours of the *ideal* sister. The detailed regulations which governed convent culture in the pre-Vatican II era combined to produce an idealized and seemingly unattainable image of women religious. As one sister put it, convent life in the 1950s "was very disciplined, very programmed, very tightly structured, and quite demanding."¹³ Submitting to countless, particular regulations regarding poverty, chastity, obedience, dress, modesty and mortification, the ideal sister was impeccable in her appearance and behaviour. Her habit donned in exacting detail, the ideal sister adopted a silent tread and down-cast eyes, taking care to ensure physical reserve with all people. She was obedient, self-critical and accepted with gratitude any penances meted out by her Superiors. She was hard-working and tireless, complying with all demands of horarium and Rule. The Ursuline Constitutions noted that sisters should employ all means

¹³Frances Ryan, O.S.U, interview by author, 4 October 2004, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

of self denial, and that

they should mortify their senses and appetites constantly, often denying to sight, hearing and smell even innocent gratifications, in order to keep these sources of danger under control. They should mortify their taste as often as they go to table, never eat between meals . . . They should never touch one another except as the Rule allows, and they should be prudently reserved and circumspect in their intercourse . . . Their interior obedience should be supernatural and blind.¹⁴

Seemingly unattainable, the “blind” obedience necessary to comply with the innumerable regulations and idealized standards of pre-Vatican II convent life had little to do with the real, lived experience of women, or an understanding of what it meant to *be* a woman.

Referred to as ‘religious’ or ‘virgins’, women religious were expected to be “supernatural” in their obedient compliance to idealized attitudes and behaviours, and were thereby distanced from a sense of themselves as ‘women.’

The idealization of women religious found iconic expression and validation in the image of the Virgin Mary. The strong influence of traditional Marian devotion established that women religious were to venerate Mary, the mother of Jesus, and this included imitation of her spotless virginity, perfection and piety. As such, regulations pertaining to modesty and decorum often referred to the sisters as ‘virgins’ rather than as ‘sisters’ or ‘women’. ‘Virgin’, in this context, refers not only to the state of physical virginity (though this was surely presupposed), but also to the perfection and purity of spirit attributed to the Virgin Mary. For example, among countless instances of such referencing is a rather curious description of how sisters ought to sleep, which advises that the religious “shall lay themselves down with the modesty befitting a virgin.”¹⁵ While no specific direction accompanies this prescription,

¹⁴*Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union, Ursuline Convent “The Pines”, Chatham, Ontario, 1952. OSU Archives, Chatham Ontario.*

¹⁵*The Rule and Constitutions of the Institute of the Religious of St. Ursula, of the Diocese of London, Ontario, Canada, 1915, Chapter XIX, Ursuline Archives,*

virginal repose is somehow differentiated from the less modest retiring and sleeping habits of non-religious women. While attitudes and behaviours “befitting a virgin” were actively promoted in the regulations of religious communities, these were idealistic in nature and reveal little about the attitudes and lived experiences of women in convent life.

In the oral histories collected for this study women religious described an awareness that, even if life in the convent had not yet changed, the world around them was changing significantly in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. For example, when talking about the late 1960s, sisters made comments such as,

You know, by then we were into the hippie generation.¹⁶

You were spending all of your summers on a university campus and all your winters teaching kids in an atmosphere where the world was changing and the kids were different . . . there was a certain amount of ‘sophistication’, if you like, around the world changes.¹⁷

Clearly, at least in hindsight, sisters recognize the significant changes in the world and, by extension, on women’s lives in the period. At the same time, the contemporary scholar must question whether or not these women had the same consciousness about the outside world at the time when these changes in attitudes were occurring. As much as they were connected to classrooms and university life, until the later 1960s convent life remained, in many ways, very insular.

In order to achieve a sense of sisters’ ideas about girls and women in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council, and in order to appreciate how these ideas changed over time, an analysis of convent culture’s discourses on women and girls is essential.

Chatham, Ontario.

¹⁶Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

¹⁷Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

Meaningful ideas about the changes in sisters' understandings of young women are found in a rather obscure set of discourses - that is, the commentary about girls and young women interspersed throughout the Ursuline congregation's General Chapter Minutes from the 1950s and 60s.¹⁸ These discourses, identified as descriptions of 'the modern girl' or 'today's youth', are commentaries designed to describe for the community's membership the qualities of those young women who attended Ursuline-run schools.

The discourse analyses which follow rely on the premise that convent culture's production and promulgation of discourses about young women reveals as much (or more) about how sisters perceived themselves, secular women and girls, and a rapidly changing society as it does about the lived experience of young women and girls in secular society in the period. According to Mary Louise Adams, discourses produced by North American institutions in the postwar era served as "symbolic devices to underline the gravity of problems wrought by changes in the modern world and the need for ameliorative actions." Adams argues that "references to 'children' and 'youth' were regularly employed by a whole range of social critics" and that "the collective progress of adolescents could indicate the shape society would take in the future; youth operated as a metaphor for the development of the society as a whole."¹⁹ In the case of the discourses examined in this thesis, references to girls and young women serve as a metaphor for the often uneven and anxiety-ridden

¹⁸Parallel discourses were not found in the minutes of the Holy Names congregation's minutes. It is possible that similar discourses were used as illustrations, but that they were not included in the Chapter minutes. On the other hand, it is possible that they did not entertain such discourses. This does not necessarily indicate, however, that the Holy Names sisters' notions about young women were dissimilar to those of the Ursuline community. Given their similar work in teaching and their close geographic proximity, it is likely that the Ursulines' discourses are representative of the ideas held by other teaching communities such as the Holy Names sisters.

¹⁹Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 40.

development of identity, both individual and collective, within convent culture in the pre-conciliar era of the 1950s and the immediate post-conciliar period of the late 1960s. The remainder of this Chapter explores three discrete discourses taken from the Ursuline Chapter Minutes of 1957, 1967 and 1969.

Recorded in the Minutes of the Ursulines' 1957 General Chapter is a description of "the modern girl." Prior to 1957, similar discourses do not appear in the community's Chapter minutes, and therefore the fact that "the modern girl" is raised as a key issue for the community in 1957 cannot be attributed solely to the sisters' interests as educators; rather, their interest appears to be closely tied to the larger trends and concerns of postwar society.

As Owram notes of the baby-boom era:

Between 1951 and 1961, the ten-to-nineteen age group in Canada increased by more than a million people. Each year more and more of the Canadian population were interested in adolescent fashions, issues, and identity. . . . By the later 1950s, the teenage culture was clearly defined.²⁰

The drastic increase in the youth population, combined with the economic, social and political circumstances of the postwar era, produced a teenage culture unprecedented in its profile and influence.²¹ While the youth culture of the 1950s was distinct and innovative in its music, consumer habits and dating rituals, it was also a prized and closely guarded culture as the postwar era bred conservatism and caution. A return to 'normalcy' in the postwar era would necessitate not only a hopeful optimism in the next generation, but also the adoption of traditional gender ideologies. In this way, the youth of the 1950s were not so different from

²⁰Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 145-6.

²¹Ibid., 145. Owram argues for the particularity of the 1950s term 'teenager' as a "special word because, unlike 'adolescence,' it implied a whole culture rather than merely a state of hormonal transition." For more on the reciprocal relationship between the baby boom and the economic, social and political forces of the era, see Owram, especially 148, and chapters 7 and 8.

the previous generation; as Cynthia Comacchio demonstrates:

the 1920s and the 1950s shared a popular focus on adolescence. . . Both were decades of recovery and reconstruction after global wars in which Canada . . . played a major “adult” role. These national experiences understandably gave rise to perspectives that looked at once backward in sorrow at the toll on the nation’s youth and forward in the hope for the future that youth intrinsically represented. Both decades saw a renewed celebration of domesticity in the name of a “normalcy” interrupted by war. . . Between 1920 and 1950, and intertwined youth market and youth culture were established as components of a modern industrial nation.²²

While it is important to note the historical distinctiveness of the 1950s baby boom in both its size and its ‘teenage’ culture, Comacchio argues that it is important to remember that it shared similarities with the post-World War I generation. For the purposes of this study, this is particularly salient as the connections between the producers of the following 1957 discourse (many of them sisters raised in the post-World War I era) and its subjects are explored.

The Superior General of the community, Mother Kathleen, drawing on the work of an unnamed “speaker” at a conference, offers this depiction of ‘the modern girl’:

The modern girl is nervous, having a tendency toward physical and psychological sickness, little power of resistance, . . . quickly tires and needs much relaxation and sleep in order to be able to work. Her memory, attention and perseverance are weakened simply because these require sound faculties of body and nerves.²³

Mother Kathleen states that her intention in sharing the above quote with the Chapter delegates was to provide “an insight into the change in our youth today” as she attempted to justify the increasing tendency of young women in the 1950s to enter the convent for a short time but to leave before taking final vows. The Chapter Minutes note that from 1951-1957,

²²Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2006), 215.

²³Minutes of the 1957 General Chapter, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

99 young women entered the community as postulants but only about half stayed.²⁴ This perhaps indicates that although a vocations ‘crisis’ was not yet imminent in North America, young women of the 1950s, though still drawn to the convent in significant numbers, were becoming less inclined to commit to the rigid lifestyle which the religious life entailed. It seems possible that in this period the convent was beginning to be used by some young Catholic women as a transitional device, facilitating movement from late adolescence to early adulthood. Such a description embodies numerous implications about 1950s’ convent culture. First, this view of ‘the modern girl’ is revelatory of an intersection between convent culture and the modern psychological and medical theories of the 1950s.²⁵ As Comacchio argues, the work of experts like G. Stanley Hall greatly influenced the twentieth century perception of adolescence as a “condition of ‘physical and mental anarchy’ fraught with nervous disorders and all their imagined ill-effects.” In the post-war eras, “even as more girls attended high school and pursued higher education and careers than ever before, earlier medical concerns about the potential for ‘intellectual development’ to undermine the physical development . . . of girl[s] . . . took on extra resonance.”²⁶ In the above convent discourse on ‘the modern girl,’ inadequacies in her behaviour, personality and abilities are attributed to “physical and psychological sickness,” rather than such factors as, for example, lack of faith or innate character flaws. The “body and nerves” of girls in the 1950s are somehow

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵See Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, for analysis of the intersection of psychological theory and gender in the period. For discussion of the medicalization of Canadian adolescents, see Cynthia Comacchio, “‘Living Symptoms’: Adolescent Health Care in English Canada, 1920 - 1970” in *Children’s Health Issues in Historical Perspective*, Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds. (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 355-390.

²⁶Comacchio, “‘Living Symptoms’,” 359-360.

inadequately developed according to this description, and this leads to girls' inabilities in the areas of "memory, attention and perseverance." Fault is not to be placed on the girls, their families, or their teachers (the sisters themselves); instead, this rationale medicalizes the girls' shortcomings, and it is an illusory illness plaguing young women that is of concern.

A second consideration when examining the above description of 'the modern girl' is that adopting the notion that girls were prone to "physical and psychological sickness" may have been a convenient way to explain or justify the declining popularity of convent life. As noted in Chapter One, in 1952 Pope Pius XII had articulated his concerns regarding a vocations crisis affecting women's religious communities in Europe, and although a state of 'crisis' was not evident in Canadian communities in the 1950s, Superiors had been forewarned of such a trend. Although Canadian religious communities continued to increase in membership throughout the 1950s,²⁷ Marc Lessard and Jean Paul Montminy's 1965 *Census of Religious Sisters of Canada* demonstrates that the percentage of variation across each five-year period was on a consistent decline. That is, although numbers were growing throughout this period, they did so at increasingly slower rates. This would have created increasing concern for Superiors, for although they were attracting new members, the numbers of women entering religious life was declining steadily and significantly over the decade.

²⁷See Marc A. Lessard and Jean Paul Montminy, *The Census of Religious Sisters of Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Religious Conference, 1966), Table 2, p. 345, which records the number of women religious in Canada every five years, from 1940 to 1965, and which demonstrates an increase in numbers of women religious in Canada from 43,994 in 1940 to 61,885 in 1965. For further discussion of this trend, see Elizabeth Smyth, "Professionalization Among the Professed," in *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work*, E. Smyth, S. Acker, P. Bourne, A. Prentice, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 234-254, especially 245-247.

Rooted in medical and psychological theories about young women, Mother Kathleen's description offers a seemingly credible explanation for what she sees as an inability of girls to withstand the rigours of traditional religious life. Further, this places the responsibility for the community's failure to retain recruits on something seemingly outside of their control - the health of the typical 'modern girl'. If, however, Adams's assertion that "youth operated as a metaphor for the development of the society as a whole," is applied to the above discourse, perhaps such a statement is reflective of the collective physical and mental state of the sisters themselves, serving as an indicator of their own anxieties about the possibility of imminent reforms to convent life and their own abilities to weather such changes. As established in Chapter One, 1950s' papal directives regarding adaptation were directed toward General Superiors of women's religious communities; however, it was likely that other sisters, especially those who served as delegates to General Chapters, had a sense that change was imminent. Still, even the most influential in the community were not really able to predict what particular forms these adaptations might take, and it would be natural that a certain degree of anxiety about these imminent but as yet undefined changes would lead sisters to question their abilities to adapt. It is quite plausible, therefore, that sisters would, whether consciously or unconsciously, question the collective 'health' of the community, perhaps worried about *their* "power of resistance" and *their* "faculties of body and nerves."

One decade later, at the Ursulines' 1967 Extraordinary General Chapter, a strikingly different image of 'the girl' is presented, and it is evident in this discourse that the community had made significant adjustments to their vision of modern young women. Much had changed between 1957 and 1967. The "patriotic pulls of the war years, the Cold War

jitters, the cult of domesticity, and the strong economy of the postwar years produced relative quiet on the political front through the later 1940s and 1950s” and this had created what Owram refers to as a “black-and-white world,” predictable and altruistic in its pursuit of democracy.²⁸ By the mid-1960s, however, North American society was beset by social and political upheaval. The North American Civil rights movement, student power and other issues, such as “Natives’ rights, inner-city poverty, student power and, most revolutionary of all, the role of women,” increased in visibility and vocality as the ’60s progressed, calling into question existing political systems and power structures.²⁹ The influences of these movements on 1960s youth culture were appreciable as they challenged postwar conservatism and traditionalism and legitimized resistance to authority. The social mores to which men and women had subscribed in the 1950s would give way to new and less-rigidly gendered patterns of social interaction, sexual behaviour, dress, employment and leisure.

As Owram argues, it is not easy to define ‘the sixties’ and, by extension, the youth culture of the period. Observing that the “years of radical dissent and counter-cultural efflorescence” were concentrated in the mid- to late sixties, from 1965 to 1968,³⁰ Owram also notes that many young people were apolitical, but that “this was an age in which the rhetoric of political activism and the influence of radical ideas were pronounced.”³¹ This rhetoric of radicalism informs the Ursulines’ portrait of ‘the girl’ of 1967. The 1967

²⁸Ibid., 161.

²⁹Ibid., 171.

³⁰Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 160.

³¹Ibid., 166.

description, which is titled “Characteristics of the Girl Entering Religious Life Today,” appears to be crafted by members of the Committee on Formation, a group of Ursuline sisters who reported to the General Chapter on the issue of recruitment of young women to the religious life.

She is different, but not less good than we were. She comes to us having had a good deal of freedom to make her own decisions, to travel more widely, to express her own opinions quite freely. She is dead serious about problems which beset society and is anxious to do something about them right now. She thinks tomorrow may be too late. She thinks great injustices are occurring under our own gaze, and we are concerned about details, such as the kind of habit we will wear, where we sit in chapel, deportment, etc. She is capable of praying for an hour, but it may not be in chapel; rather, it may be on the grounds or on the fourth floor veranda. She prefers to pray in private. She is convinced of the value of prayer, but not of legislation that tells her the hour and the place to pray. She shows considerable initiative in ways to do a job, given the opportunity. She has real concern for the poor, the lonely, the aged, and will inconvenience herself for them. She will wear her hair in a style different from ours to show her rebellion against what she considers an exaggerated concern on our part for cleanliness and order. She is searching earnestly for authenticity, a real sense of community, respect for herself and for others is as individuals . . . In her idealism she is frightened that religious life might make her bitter and self-centred and critical. She is not afraid of work, but doesn't want busy work that is obviously just to keep her occupied. She wants a challenge.³²

In contrast to the 1957 image, no longer are girls described as physically and psychologically weak; instead, the community is presented with an image of a healthy, idealistic young woman of the sixties who is desirous of social challenge, and her concerns for freedom and social justice and her idealism and rebellion against traditional ways parallel the sisters' own struggles to adjust to a changing world.

In the above discourse, several factors combine to create the girl of 1967, not the least of which is her increased “freedom”, and the description emphasizes that girls in the late

³²*Minutes of the 1967 Extraordinary General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.*

1960s had ‘different’ opportunities in the areas of decision-making, travel and freedom of expression than did her predecessors. This is certainly in direct parallel to the changed circumstances of the sisters’ lives in the same period. With community reforms in the areas of governance, daily living and dress, sisters, too, had increased freedoms to make choices, to travel and to speak their minds. While, in many cases these were probably welcomed changes, for some sisters - especially those who had been members of the community for many years - these new freedoms were not easily adopted. Newfound freedoms to make decisions, regarding the direction of one’s career, for example, were no doubt exciting, but they were sometimes met with concern or trepidation, given that this was an unprecedented experience for many. Mother Dominica described an incident which occurred in her early years as Superior General of the Ursuline community (likely around 1969) wherein a sister came to her to ask what her ‘assignment’ would be for the following year:

‘Well,’ I said, ‘You *find* a job. *You* find one.’ Well! She thought this was terrible - I wouldn’t even tell her where she was going! I said, ‘No, you find something you think you’re interested in.’ Anyway, that’s what she did. But it was quite priceless for her because it just had never been done.³³

Similarly, in the early 1970s Sister Ruth Marie, who had entered the community in the mid-1950s, and who had taught in both elementary and high schools for many years and served as Dean of Students at Brescia College, found herself in her first job interview as an adult:

When I left Brescia. . . I did a Master’s in Social Work. Before the end of that year the Superior General told me that she really wouldn’t be able to place me and to go ahead and look for a job, which was a whole new experience, because we had never been interviewed before. I hadn’t been interviewed since I was a teenager, when I started working at Zellers!³⁴

Clearly, the ‘freedoms’ experienced by ‘girls’ in 1967 were somewhat of a novelty to women

³³Dominica Dietrich, O.S.U., interview by author.

³⁴Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U. interview by author.

religious in the same period. The pressure exerted by Superiors upon sisters to exercise independence, as described by Mother Dominica, and the challenge of doing the unfamiliar, as in Sister Ruth Marie's description of her first job interview, demonstrate that new freedoms to make decisions in the immediate post-Vatican II era were sometimes fraught with tensions.

Another striking characteristic of the 'girl' described above was her concern with "problems which beset society." In this discourse, the girl is described as being critical of convent culture: "She thinks great injustices are occurring under our own gaze, and we are concerned about details, such as the kind of habit we will wear, where we sit in chapel, deportment, etc." The girl's urgent concern for social justice is juxtaposed with the concerns of the sisters - the girl is concerned for the state of the world, whereas the sisters are preoccupied with regulations governing dress, routines and deportment. If, in fact, this discourse about youth reveals something about the anxieties and concerns of its producers, it demonstrates that the sisters themselves may have been torn between their own concerns regarding social justice in the modern world and their community's long-standing preoccupation with strict regulations governing dress, routines and deportment. Not only would individuals have been torn by their inner conflicts, but communities were also divided on issues of change, particularly those changes which affected their physical comforts and appearance. For example, Sister Mary described an incident where a seemingly simple decision divided the sisters in the small convent where she lived:

One of the significant things I remember - and it may sound kind of silly but it really impacted me - was when I lived in Wallaceburg and we were trying to make community decisions and not have decisions handed down [by the Superior]. We were trying to decide because one or two of the sisters wanted to put rugs in the hallways in the convent because it was noisy when people walked. And I disagreed with it because I thought, 'We don't need that. Who

needs a rug in the hall? Just tell people to walk more quietly. It might be more to the point. And why put rugs in a hallway? We don't need to live plush.' I was thinking about poverty and spending all this money putting these rugs in. And so we talked about it and everything, and we finally had to vote on it. And they won out. And I was really upset about it.³⁵

Although Sister Mary was upset because she had lost in the voting, it is also probable that her frustration stemmed, in part, from the fact that the conflict concerned something material and seemingly trivial; in her mind the money spent on the carpet would be better spent on charitable works. When decisions had been made and handed down by their authoritarian Superiors, sisters did not have to give much thought to the moral dimensions of the decisions as their vow of obedience bound them to blind compliance. Increased freedoms challenged the meaning of the vow of obedience, forcing sisters to consider their personal responsibility in decision-making, even when these decisions were made at a communal level. In this case, Sister Mary's concern with the cost of the rugs had much to do with the relationship between what was, in her mind, a frivolous purchase and her commitment to the vow of poverty. Viewed from this angle, this incident demonstrates a tension between a concern for the needs of the world and a concern for quiet and comfort.

Another specific concern of the girl of 1967 is reflected in the comments regarding modern hairstyles. As Owram notes, significant changes in styles and appearance among youth in the latter part of the 1960s were tied to shifting understandings of gender:

The obsession of the post-war years with images of masculinity and femininity gave way to a much more relaxed and androgynous style of fashion and behaviour. That was what made it rebellious. Those androgynous styles, from the skinny 'Twiggy' look to long hair on men, were now the very soul of

³⁵Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author, 15 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

youthful erotic imagery. Those who did not understand were irrelevant.³⁶

The comment that the girl of the late sixties wore her hair “different from ours to show her rebellion against what she considers an exaggerated concern on our part for cleanliness and order” speaks as much to teen trends of the late sixties as it does to sisters’ new concerns with appearance and gender. Although hairstyles may seem like a superficial or trivial subject, hairstyles were, in all likelihood, a preoccupation for many women religious at the time. As sisters moved from the traditional habit which covered the hair entirely, to modified habits which revealed only bangs, to lay clothing without a headdress or veil, modern, fashionable hairstyles became a “body project”³⁷ for the sisters. Further, as sisters’ modes of dress underwent changes, the attention which those in the secular world paid to the seemingly sudden transformation to sisters’ appearance was new and, in some cases, overwhelming for some sisters.

The issue of fashionable or modern hairstyles is an important and curious one, given that women religious had been veiled for centuries. Although sisters’ concerns regarding the fashionable appearance of their hair were new to the post-conciliar era, curious regulations regarding grooming governed hairstyles even in the pre-conciliar years when hair was completely covered by a headdress and veil. For example, the Ursuline sisters were advised that their hair must be entirely covered but that it must “not be dishevelled by negligence nor

³⁶Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 271.

³⁷American historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg uses the term ‘body project’ to describe the ways in which modern girls and young women shape their bodies (i.e., their hair, skin, weight, etc.) as a reflection of the fact that they “organize their thinking about themselves around their bodies . . . because they believe that the body is the ultimate expression of the self.” Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project* (New York: Random House, 1997), 97. I use it here to designate the fact that in the post-conciliar period the sisters’ care of their hair moved from a seemingly innocuous, private concern to an issue related to self-expression and identity.

arranged with studied care.”³⁸ Sisters, therefore, had concerns regarding hairstyling in the past; in the post-conciliar period, however, the gaze of a curious public and pressures, real or perceived, to conform to styles of the day would have intensified their concerns and heightened their awareness of the issue of fashion.

Sister Ruth Marie recalled her own unique experience of exposing her hair when, in 1967, the regulation requiring the wearing of a night veil was repealed:

I was ill for nine months - I had tuberculosis - and so I was in a sanatorium in London for six months, and you didn't get dressed every time you went down the hall - you were in a housecoat or something of that nature. And I think it was about three months after I was there that we no longer had to wear what we called a night veil, which was like a fancy hat, when we were ill or when we were in bed. And so, that was quite a sensation to the people I lived with. . . . People lined up to see if I had any hair!³⁹

Similarly, Sister Patricia Anne, a long-time teacher and principal at The Pines High School, recalled wearing a modified habit to work for the first time. (See Appendix 6 for photographs of communities' modified habits.) Although she was betrayed by her deep voice, Sister Patricia clearly looked very different in a short skirt and modified veil.

I remember the day I went in the short habit over [to the High School], the janitor didn't know me until I spoke, and he had been around the school for years! (laughter) It was only my voice that gave me away!⁴⁰

Although, in hindsight, these anecdotes are amusing, in reality a certain degree of uneasiness or self-consciousness must have accompanied the transition to modified habits and secular clothing. In fact, in their retelling of the stories around changes in dress some sisters made a

³⁸“Letter from Bishop Kidd, Diocese of London, regarding Constitutional clarifications,” presented at the 1945 General Chapter, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

³⁹Ruth Marie Curry, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁴⁰Patricia Anne Turner, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

discernable effort to downplay the difficulty of the transition to secular clothing, making qualifying comments such as, “It didn’t bother me at all,”⁴¹ or “ I found it very easy to do”⁴²; but these comments seemed dismissive, or even defensive, rather than genuine expressions of their comfort with change in dress and their ease of adaptation.

Other sisters were more forthright about their adjustment to new forms of dress in the late 1960s. Sister Mary recalled a difficult process of transition to a modified habit and, a few years later, to secular clothing:

I wore it [to Summer School] and everybody was wondering about it. It hadn’t been made to measure for the person, and I was heavy-set and, for me, it was very uncomfortable. I mean, it was nice and it was short and I had to pretend it was wonderful, but it wasn’t made for women I don’t think - there wasn’t enough room in the bust. I think that once we had them made and fitted a little later on in the process it was a lot better. And then we went from the oxford-type shoe into a kind of a pump with a medium heel on it - so that was my first experience with that. . . . And then later we just wore regular clothes, but it was a big challenge because having entered so young it was hard to know about the changes in style and what was appropriate for my age and all that kind of thing. I found that very difficult. . . . So I had to kind of challenge myself to make the move because I saw that it was better - you could almost hide under it because you became almost a sexless being with all this stuff covering you up - and in a way, it made you come more into identity with who you are as a woman, who I am as a woman, I should say. So it was kind of a challenge for me.⁴³

Sister Mary is one of only a few women who mentioned feelings about weight or body image when recalling the adjustment to changes in dress. Given that some sisters had worn the traditional habit for decades before transitioning to the more fitted and more revealing modified habit, and later to secular clothing, it is likely that many sisters had similar feelings

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Kathleen O’Mara, O.S.U. interview by author, 23 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁴³Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author.

at the time. It is difficult to determine whether, for most sisters, these feelings have faded with time, or whether they simply choose to remember their more positive experiences as they adjusted to changes in appearance.

Sister Mary's comments also indicate that the adoption of modified habits and, later, secular clothing, were catalysts for self-discovery and for a heightened consciousness regarding a connection between identity as a woman and increased awareness of one's body. This transition from what Sister Mary describes as a shift from seeing one's self as a "sexless being" to an increased "identity . . . as a woman" would likely have been very gradual and accompanied by both anxiety and pleasure. Sister Mary notes that the 'new' clothing was "short" and "very uncomfortable" given that she was "heavy-set"; under the flowing layers of the floor-length habit the body would have been disguised, but more fitted modified habits and secular clothing would have made sisters much more aware of the size and shape of their bodies. No longer able to "hide under" the traditional habit, sisters of the conciliar era entered into a process of self-knowledge and adjustment.

For some sisters, however, this transition in dress opened possibilities that were freeing and pleasurable. Sister Suzanne relayed the story of purchasing her first 'real' bathing suit. In the pre-conciliar years, sisters could go swimming when at the lake, but never in the presence of seculars, and the usual attire was bloomers or a loose-fitting 'gym suit'. With increased freedoms and the introduction of lay clothing, the sisters had need of proper swimwear. Sisters who wished to purchase swimwear were instructed to do so, but were told that they must 'model' the swimsuit for their Superior who would ensure its appropriateness. When Sister Suzanne presented herself at the Superior's office in a *red* swimsuit, the Superior replied, "Why am I not surprised?!" Sister Suzanne had not realized

that it was expected that the swimsuit be either navy or black, and she recalled that “colour made me feel *human*.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Sister Eleanor recalled the novelty of clothing of colour:

At first, everybody could get two dresses - I got a burgundy one and a dark green one - the dark green had gold buttons and a little grey insert, I remember, and the burgundy one was because I couldn't get red.⁴⁵

The simple fact that sisters remember specific articles of clothing in such detail and with such emotional attachment indicates that this transition was a significant one in their lives in the late 1960s. Not only would coloured clothing make one, as Sister Suzanne put it, “feel human,” but it also served to increase a sense of individualism. Sister Eleanor’s desire for a red dress was likely not typical - many sisters chose to wear black or blue clothing, and continue to do so to this day. However, the option to choose one’s clothing, to express oneself through clothing, and the individualism promoted through such choices and expressions serve as important indicators of both the freedoms and the anxieties associated with reforms to dress. In fact, as excited as Sister Suzanne was about some of the newfound freedoms regarding clothing, such as the purchase of the red swimsuit, she also recalled that, initially, she “resisted” wearing coloured clothes in her day-to-day life.

For me, coloured clothes was going to be a big temptation. Proud as I was I would want to stay with what was in style. . . . And this was the time of short skirts - and I had nice looking legs - and I didn't want to wear long. . . . For me, the feminine look was important. For so long the religious habit made me drab, and God made me a woman and I was proud to be a woman. . . . It was important to me not to be ‘nunny’.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M, interview by author, 15 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

⁴⁵Eleanor Gleeson, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario. When I interviewed Sister Eleanor, Superior of the Ursuline community in the Fall of 2001, she wore a red sweater.

⁴⁶Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M, interview by author.

Sister Suzanne's comments reveal that, at least in her case, and likely for other sisters, there was an explicit connection between new modes of dress and a process of discerning of what it meant to look like and to be a woman. The notions that coloured clothing would be a 'temptation' and that secular dress might somehow lessen or taint her identity as a nun, conflicted with a newly recognized freedom to identify as a woman on her own terms. The rejection of a 'nunny' image in favour of 'being a woman' was not as simple as coming to terms with having 'nice legs'; it also involved a reassessment of how one was viewed in the eyes of others, and in the eyes of God. The conflicting feelings associated with wearing coloured clothing, though it did not prevent sisters like Suzanne and Eleanor from making the transition to coloured clothing, points to a deep-seated tension inherent in the adjustment from traditional to secular dress.

Relatedly, the concern expressed regarding the girl of 1967 parallels a tension within the community between those who remained bound by "an exaggerated concern. . .for cleanliness and order" and those who indulged in the freedom to discard previous regulations regarding grooming and experimented with new looks and styles. In fact, the oral narratives of some sisters indicated that such tensions regarding change in dress did exist within communities. Sister Rose Marie Blonde recalled the difficulties that some Ursulines experienced regarding changes in appearance.

My aunt, my father's sister, was in this community - she's been dead quite a few years now. I didn't enjoy visiting her, because she was very old and she was very unhappy at that stage in her life, and she complained a lot. And I remember being in her room one day visiting with her and she was complaining, "Oh, these people who wear ordinary clothes and who do this and who do that!" And I looked right at her and I said, "But Sister St. Gregory, *I'm* doing all those things." And she said, "Oh, well you're different. You're my niece!" (Laughter) . . . But anyway, there were a number of the

sisters for whom it was very difficult.⁴⁷

Similarly, Sister Suzanne recalled that some members of her community had difficulty accepting her decision to wear jeans when she went to work in prison ministry in the early 1970s. “Some of the older sisters stopped talking to me,” she noted. “The sisters found it very difficult to see me in slacks.”⁴⁸ Given the experiences of Sisters Rose Marie and Suzanne, it is likely that the same “rebellion” ascribed to the “girl” in the 1967 discourse was, in fact, something that some sisters perceived in the younger and/or more progressive sisters in their own ranks.

Given the tensions within the community regarding changes to dress and appearance, it is not surprising that the Ursulines drew attention to the fact that the “girl” of 1967 is fearful of the affect that religious life might have on her. She is “frightened that religious life might make her bitter and self-centred and critical.” It is quite plausible that the fear of the effects of traditional religious life is revelatory of the concern of many sisters in the late '60s that religious life may, in fact, not reform itself sufficiently and that they might not be able to adapt and function as women religious in the modern world. In fact, perhaps indicative of the fact that some sisters were having difficulty adapting to changing convent culture, very shortly after the production of this discourse noting the fears regarding the effects of traditional religious life, a significant exodus occurred in religious communities across North America. The departures from the Ursuline and Holy Names communities resulted in reductions in membership between the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though an in-depth discussion of the departures of women from religious communities is beyond the scope of

⁴⁷Rose Marie Blonde, O.S.U., interview by author, 15 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁴⁸Suzanne Malette, S.N.J.M, interview by author.

this study,⁴⁹ which intentionally looks at women who stayed in community through this period of reform, it is important to note that the exodus of their peers significantly affected the sisters who stayed.

Almost all Ursuline and Holy Names sisters had strong emotional reactions when asked about the period of exodus from their communities, and although a few were not willing to posit reasons for their peers' departures, most sisters made comments similar to these:

It was sad, it was sad. Everyday there were people leaving. And usually we didn't know, they kind of left silently in the dark of night, so it was very sad. In the morning you weren't sure - if they weren't at mass or at breakfast was it because they were sick or because they left? Why did they leave? You never really got a chance to really talk to them. My perception at the time was that they maybe didn't like all the changes or they didn't feel at home.⁵⁰

I think it was a very painful time for many of us - the ones who left and the ones who stayed. . . . And at the same time I can remember questioning, 'Why am I staying?' . . . I think some left because it was too strict and some left because it was not strict enough.⁵¹

I think I had a hard time with it when they were all leaving. And it certainly made me question why I was staying too, you know. I think it was hard because at first I couldn't understand why everybody was going. And you'd lose good friends and you'd wonder why and it would be all of a sudden they'd disappear and be gone. . . . Maybe [change] opened the door for some

⁴⁹Significant sociological studies have examined the decline of religious life, including the exodus of sisters from religious communities in the post-Vatican II period. Most significant are the works of Helen Ebaugh, including, "The Growth and Decline of the Population of Catholic Nuns Cross-Nationally, 1960-1990: A Case of Secularization as Social Structural Change," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35 (1996): 171-83; *Women in the Vanishing Cloister* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993); and *Out of the Cloister* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1977).

⁵⁰Eleanor Gleeson, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁵¹Mary Teresa Antaya, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

who really were dissatisfied and wanted to get out and didn't see a way.⁵²

As far as sisters who had been in a long time, I suppose for some of them maybe the changes were too difficult . . . Always there were some for whom we didn't change fast enough, and others for whom we were changing too fast. And some I think got caught up in the wave of 'this isn't the in thing to do anymore,' so they went and now I think sometimes they wonder if that was the best decision or not. . . . I know a lot of the sisters think that if we hadn't changed the habit and all this kind of thing that maybe we'd have more sisters because sometimes you look and you see that maybe some people are attracted to that type of lifestyle. But I don't think so . . . We had to change. I don't know if it necessarily follows that that's why people left - I mean, I think some of them would have left if we hadn't changed - well some of them left because we weren't changing fast enough.⁵³

A lot of the people who left - and they left in exodus from every community - they wanted the changes in the Church to happen more quickly than they happened. We know that the Church moves about a quarter of an inch in twenty years. Change is not easy. . . . Some couldn't adapt. They wanted to community to move faster. . . . I was sorry to see them go. We lost some valuable people. It was difficult.⁵⁴

The perceptions of those women who stayed regarding the exodus of women from communities in the late 1960s and early 1970s are revealing. Almost all Ursuline and Holy Names sisters expressed sorrow at the loss of members, and yet, even after thirty years, many women remain unable to draw definitive conclusions about why their fellow sisters chose to leave religious life. Comments like, "maybe they didn't like all the changes. . ."; "some left because it was too strict and some . . . because it was not strict enough. . ."; "there were some for whom we didn't change fast enough, and others for whom we were changing too fast"; and, "some couldn't adapt," indicate that the sisters who stayed had a sense that there was a connection between reforms and the departures of their peers, but that they were not able to

⁵²Mary Waters, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁵³Rose Marie Blonde, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁵⁴Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 3 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

reach specific conclusions regarding the motivations behind some sisters' decisions to leave their communities. This may be, in part, because the sisters who stayed were, at the time, struggling with their own adjustments to changes in dress, lifestyle and work. Also, because women who chose to take leave of the community departed quietly, often during the night and without any sort of announcement to the community, the sisters who remained were unprepared for the loss. Compounding this was the fact that, like the girl of 1967, the sisters too were "frightened that religious life might make [them]. . . bitter and self-centred and critical." The experience of fear which accompanied change likely rendered those sisters who stayed in their communities less able than they otherwise might have been to make sense of the exodus of their peers from religious life. Not only were sisters unable to fully understand the motivations of their peers, but their own commitment to religious life was often called into question as they witnessed these departures.

Finally, the aforementioned girl of 1967 "is not afraid of work, but doesn't want busy work." Certainly, by 1967 women religious perceive girls as much more capable and ambitious than their 1957 counterparts whose "tendency toward physical and psychological sickness" led them to tire quickly and to need "much relaxation and sleep in order to be able to work." By the late 1960s girls are thought to be physically and emotionally stronger, more ambitious and also seemingly more selective regarding their employment choices, eschewing "busy work." This shift in thinking about young women parallels many of the trends in convent life and in the sisters' perceptions regarding their work.

In the post-Vatican II years, women religious diversified their areas of employment. This occurred for a number of reasons, including the ever-increasing educational opportunities for sisters which had begun in the 1950s, changes in the educational system and, of course, a broadening of employment opportunities for women generally. For

example, Mother St. David, in the Superior General's Report to the Ursulines' 1969 Chapter, noted several new "apostolic ventures" in which sisters were engaged between 1965 and 1970. These included sisters working in such roles as: Executive Officer in the Office on Aging, Department of Social and Family Services, Toronto; co-director at Divine Word Catechetical Centre in London; social workers; consultants in the fields of art, music and catechetics; nurse in a general hospital; community worker in a program to study Negro-white racial attitudes in the city suburbs Memphis, Tennessee; and various positions in eldercare, census-taking, and suicide prevention programs.⁵⁵ Such diversity and movement beyond the field of teaching marks a radical departure for sisters in the post-conciliar period.

In part, the expansion of communities into non-teaching fields can be attributed to reforms to education in the same period. In Ontario, the 1969 amalgamation of smaller local and rural school boards into larger county boards,⁵⁶ shifted the positions of women religious within the school system. In some cases, women religious lost local managerial authority and autonomy. As Elizabeth Smyth argues in her work on the professionalization of religious, the professionalization of secular women's work had significant effects on the work patterns of women religious in that "women religious had to compete with laypeople for positions." Further, Smyth notes that "the areas of neglect and need which communities of women religious were founded to address were falling under the umbrella of secular authorities."⁵⁷

⁵⁵"Mother St. David's Opening Address to the 1969 General Chapter," *Minutes of the 1969 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁵⁶Mark McGowan, "Distinctly Catholic: The Development of Catholic Schools in Ontario," <http://www.pvnccdsb.on.ca/library/Distinctly%20Catholic/Development%20of%20Catholic%20Sch.pdf>, accessed 24 May, 2006.

⁵⁷Elizabeth Smyth, "Professionalization among the Professed: The Case of Roman Catholic Women Religious," in *Challenging Professions: Historical and*

By extension, as the presence of women religious declined in the school system due to women leaving religious communities, the retirement of older sisters, and a decline in vocations, and as the number of lay teachers increased significantly to meet the increasing demands of baby boom enrolment, women religious no longer perceived teaching as their sole focus. Displaced within a large and rapidly expanding school system, sisters entered into new and diverse occupations.

Many sisters today see connections between the experiences of secular women in this period and their own experience with diversification in employment in the late 1960s. Sister Eleanor makes specific connections between the ambitions of women religious in the post-conciliar period and the effects of second-wave feminism:

If you had ambition you got success. I mean, we'd go to meetings and we'd be the only women at them - whether as guidance counsellors or principals or spiritual directors or. . . . And I think it was the explosion of feminism in the seventies that said . . . you could be whatever you wanted to.⁵⁸

Sister Anne also drew attention to changing opportunities for women:

When I started out, opportunities for women - you were either a teacher or a nurse or a secretary, and that was it! We were all highly educated women by the time Vatican II hit us - very few nuns don't have at least a B.A., most of us have a Master's, a number of us have doctorates - we're educated women.⁵⁹

Like the girl of 1967, sisters “were not afraid of work”; however, “busy work” was, clearly, beyond them. Not only were they a part of a new generation of women in the workforce, but they were uniquely qualified and motivated. It would seem that shifts to new areas of

Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work, ed. E. Smyth, S. Acker, P. Bourne, A. Prentice. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 249.

⁵⁸Eleanor Gleeson, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁵⁹Anne Denomy, O.S.U., interview by author, 26 October 2004, Stratford, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

employment was one aspect of post-conciliar change for which women religious were aptly prepared. The above comment by Sister Eleanor holds particular significance in that it is one of that few specific remarks made regarding “feminism” when sisters were discussing the immediate post-conciliar period. Although Eleanor notes that “the explosion of feminism” occurred in the seventies, she sees a connection between this imminent ‘explosion’ and the gradual changes in attitudes toward women and work in the late 1960s. Although many sisters would concur that, in hindsight, their actions in the years surrounding Vatican II were “feminist” in nature, it is in the area of work that sisters could most clearly see this connection in the conciliar period.

Two discourses on youth are included within the minutes of the Ursulines’ 1969 General Chapter, and both are noted as “suggested reading” in preparation for the Chapter meetings. The first, a rather brief statement, describes “today’s youth”:

They are especially affected by the world in which they live. There is a great, if not total, immersion in the communications media and in the things that affect the senses. There is confusion about the role of sex. They are impatient of restraint, yet they are fearful in independence. They often suffer a crisis of identity.⁶⁰

Also from the Ursulines’ 1969 General Chapter is the following description of “girls today.” This was made in reference to the student body at the Ursuline-run all-girls school, “The Pines”:

If you stop to think, I feel you cannot help but agree that what may have succeeded in the past would have little or no likelihood of succeeding today. Can you visualize the High School girl of today standing in line in the exact place she stood yesterday and the day before to go to the Chapel, to class, to study? Can you imagine her being satisfied to go downtown once or twice a month? Time does not stand still. . . . Other different approaches are necessary because of the greater freedom which most girls have in their

⁶⁰“Preparation Materials for the Ursuline General Chapter 1969 (unlabelled binder),” *Minutes of the 1969 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*. Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

homes; because of their wider opportunity for travel. . . ; because most of them have full- or part-time jobs in vacation; most sixteen-year olds have a driver's licence and drive the family car if they do not have their own.⁶¹

Both of the above discourses were produced only two years after the previously discussed statement on the girl of 1967, and therefore there are marked similarities among them. Like the 1967 statement, the 1969 statements underscore the fact that youth are concerned with the state of the world, and that they have extensive freedoms which generations previous would not have experienced. Most noteworthy in the 1969 statement is the reference to youth as “fearful in independence.” This comment is made alongside references to the communications media and to sexuality, aspects of secular life with which many women religious had little experience in the pre-Vatican II era. Yet again, the fears which women religious attribute to youth were very likely their own. How women religious, now dressing like their secular counterparts and entering into non-traditional employment fields, would navigate these heretofore unknown aspects of modern life would certainly have been cause for anxiety. What is particularly noteworthy about these discourses, however, is the fact that the community is *acknowledging* its fear and concerns. The conspicuous reference to youth as experiencing a “crisis of identity” is indicative of the on-going identity crisis within religious communities in the post-conciliar era.

In the second of the two 1969 discourses, the community acknowledges the changed reality for youth, noting that “what may have succeeded in the past would have little or no likelihood of succeeding today,” and that “time does not stand still.” If the interpretation of this discourse can be extended to offer a glimpse into the self-perceptions of women religious, perhaps, despite the ongoing anxieties and fears which pervaded this period of

⁶¹“Position Paper on ‘The Pines’ Residential School,” *Minutes of the 1969 General Chapter*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

change, this statement is indicative of a sense of resolve among women religious. The producer of the discourse attempts to persuade her reader of the positive aspects of change, arguing that “you cannot help but agree that what may have succeeded in the past would have little or no likelihood of succeeding today.” While women religious may not have fully processed the reforms of the immediate post-Vatican II years, by 1969 they were committed to doing so.

Conclusion

Surely, the sisters themselves did not have a conscious awareness at the time of their production that the aforementioned discourses about ‘the modern girl’ in the 1950s and ’60s were revelatory of their own concerns and anxieties. However, viewed with a 21st century gaze, and with the critical theoretical perspective of postmodern discourse analysis, sisters’ perceptions of and concerns about young women do, in fact, parallel the communities’ own anxieties around change. Three broad conclusions emerge from such analysis.

First, the very intimate psychological matters which arose for sisters during this time of change, though difficult to distinguish or uncover in official community documents or oral narratives alone, are discernable via analysis of the sisters’ discourses on girls and young women. The specific concerns therein - concerns about the body, appearance, social justice, tradition, the relevance of community life, and changes in employment - were among the many issues with which women religious were faced in the post-Vatican II era. Just as prescribed gender roles and expectations changed for secular women and girls in the period, so too did women in the convent address such changes as part of broader community reforms.

Second, the salient issues for sisters in the 1950s as reflected in the 1957 discourse - concerns about the psychological health of the community and their ‘powers of resistance’ -

are less tangible than the concerns of the 1960s. As communities shifted from the anticipation of change in the 1950s to being engaged in the process of change in the 1960s, sisters began to address intersecting psychological and material concerns. By the 1960s connections are evident between anxieties regarding identity and image and the real, lived experiences of changes to dress, work and community membership.

Third, and most importantly, it is only when the sisters' concerns are viewed as connected to the concerns of women in the larger society that we can begin to appreciate the intersections between reform to religious life and changes in gender roles and gendered institutions in the conciliar period. As Danylewycz has demonstrated of Quebec women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the lives of women religious, in order to be fully understood, must be examined "in the larger context of women's culture and work."⁶² The commonalities in the concerns of women religious and secular women as they negotiated changes in postwar Canada are not only revelatory of the similarities among religious and secular women, but also serve to illuminate an understanding of gender and changing gender roles in the period.

In keeping with Chapter Three's internal focus, the following chapter, Chapter Four, explores another intimate aspect of religious life; that is, the spiritual reading practices of the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters. An examination of reforms to the practice and content of the centuries old custom of *lectio divina*, or spiritual reading, will lead to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the experiences of transformations in the inner lives of women religious.

⁶²Marta Danylewicz, *Taking the Veil* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 159.

CHAPTER FOUR READING HABITS

An ancient Chinese proverb states: “A book is a garden carried in the pocket.” What, then, is the significance of the vast collections of books in convent libraries, both ancient and modern, from which the vowed religious have drawn their knowledge and inspiration? Surely, these are immense, enchanted forests of wisdom, which have been planted, harvested, consumed and replanted by hundreds upon thousands of literate women religious through the centuries.

A study of the contents of convent libraries would form a thesis unto itself. I endeavour only to analyse the general purpose of and changes in the reading habits¹ of women religious over time, particularly as it affected women religious in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. Recent historiography regarding women religious has addressed the issue of reforms to spiritual reading very minimally, either briefly noting changes to the practice as part and parcel of other reforms,² or in the discussion and/or analysis of particular influential texts.³ An in-depth analysis of the changes in the communal and individual practices of spiritual reading is, I believe, of key importance in understanding

¹British humourist Doug Larson is quoted as saying, “The pun is the lowest form of humour, unless you thought of it yourself.” Mea culpa.

²For example in Joan Chittister, *The Way We Were* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005), 61, the introduction of new reading materials and the purging of her community’s outdated convent library is mentioned.

³Elizabeth Kolmer, *Religious Women in the United States: A Survey of the Influential Literature from 1950 to 1983* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984) offers an overview of the literature *about* women religious, including papal encyclicals, the Documents of Vatican II, and key theological texts. Kolmer also offers some discussion of preconciliar and conciliar trends in spiritual reading, 27-35. Also see Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 36-37, for discussion of *The Nun in the World*, a particularly influential text in the conciliar period.

the nature of reform in religious communities, particularly as reform was negotiated in the Vatican II era.

First, the inquiry into the reading habits of women religious during this period of reform is important because the exercise of spiritual reading was a meaningful aspect of the daily life of religious which underwent significant change in the 1960s, transforming centuries of tradition. As a practice which informed and indoctrinated women religious and regulated their daily lives, spiritual reading was a key element of religious life both before and after Vatican II.

Second, an examination of the practice of spiritual reading provides insight into the interior lives of these women. The study of the history of reading habits involves an examination of how something seemingly 'objective' and 'exterior' - a written text - is rendered subjective and subsequently internalized. Even in the pre-Vatican II era when the routines of daily convent life, including communal and private reading, were rigidly prescribed, the process of reading itself was, on one level, personal and subjective.

Third, members of teaching communities, such as the Holy Names and Ursuline sisters, were encouraged from the 1950s on to further their training and education in order to improve their standards of qualification in order that they might provide Catholic students with instruction suited to the modern world. This necessitated a widening of the scope of reading in which sisters were engaged, as many more were pursuing university degrees in this period. While initially there was some discrepancy between what was 'suitable' reading for sisters and what was prescribed by university curricula, this dissonance was resolved in the liberalisation of communities' attitudes toward reading in general.

Fourth, the change in reading habits is both a concrete and a symbolic manifestation of the rise of individuation and individualism among women religious in the 1960s and early

1970s. With regard to concrete or material change, communal reading was abandoned in favour of individual private reading, and the choice of reading materials became the prerogative of the individual sister rather than that of her Superior. On a more symbolic level, analysis of this phenomena reveals that changes in reading practices are just one expression of profound inner shifts in the spiritual and psychological dimensions of religious life.

This chapter will, in three sections, offer a brief history of *lectio divina*, or spiritual reading; examine the pre-Vatican II practices of spiritual reading specific to the Holy Names and Ursuline sisters; and document and analyse the reforms to these practices as experienced by the sisters in the Vatican II era. Such analysis will demonstrate that the reforms to the practice of spiritual reading in the period had great influence on sisters' personal transformations in the areas of identity, individuation and spirituality.

A Brief History of Reading⁴ in Religious Life

The ancient monastics held communal reading and private study in high esteem. Sacred scripture and the works of the Church Fathers were prescribed reading for both male and female vowed religious. In the sixth century, St. Benedict, perhaps the most renowned advocate of spiritual reading, outlined in his *Regula monachorum*, or monastic Rule, the

⁴The history of reading (as distinct from the history of the book, or the history of print) is a relative newcomer among the sub-fields of social and cultural history. Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) was among the first popular histories on the subject. More recently, see Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) and Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003). Specific to women in the Medieval period, an examination of artistic depictions of women reading is offered in Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor, eds., *Women and the Book: Assessing the Evidence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). Most recently, Manguel's *The Library at Night* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), entertains the historical relationship between reader and library. Mention of spiritual reading in these texts is scant, and generally refers to monastic and medieval practices.

specific practices and routines which his followers were to follow in their daily reading regimen. This included reading at all meals, wherein a set ritual was to be followed:

At the meal times of the brothers there should always be reading; no one may dare to take up the book at random and begin to read there; but he who is about to read for the whole week shall begin his duties on Sunday. And, entering upon his office . . . he shall ask all to pray for him, that God may avert from him the spirit of elation. And this verse shall be said in the oratory three times by all, he however beginning it: 'O, Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.' And thus, having received the benediction, he shall enter upon his duties as reader. And there shall be the greatest silence at table, so that no whispering or any voice save the reader's may be heard. And whatever is needed, in the way of food, the brethren should pass to each other in turn, so that no one need ask for anything. . . .⁵

Benedict took reading aloud, a common practice in the early Middle Ages, and imbued it with religious ritual and significance. The specially chosen reader, the benediction, and the reverent silence of the listeners set spiritual reading apart from the popular practice of reading aloud for entertainment which would have been enjoyed by seculars at their firesides and in town squares.

Second only to Benedict's in its influence on religious life over the centuries, St. Augustine's Rule offers similar advice: "When you come to table, listen until you leave to what is the custom to read, without disturbance or strife. Let not your mouths alone take nourishments but let your hearts too hunger for the words of God."⁶ Further, Augustine instructs that the Rule itself is to be read routinely and communally: "That you may see yourselves in this little book, as in a mirror, have it read to you once a week so as to neglect no point through forgetfulness."⁷ For Augustine, spiritual reading was a form of sustenance, and the word of God is of no less import to religious than food is to the body. In his

⁵"Rule of St. Benedict" in *Documents of the Christian Church, 2nd edition*, H. Bettenson, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 121.

⁶"The Rule of Our Holy Father St. Augustine," Ursuline Convent, "The Pines", 1952, section III, article ii, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario. 1952.

⁷*Ibid.*, section VIII, article 2.

prescription for the weekly reading of the Rule, reading is further ritualized, ensuring that religious will learn it thoroughly and exactly.

The Augustinian and Benedictine Rules of the fifth and sixth centuries, respectively, provided the foundations for all religious Rules that would follow, and from the days of Benedict and Augustine onward the tradition of communal spiritual reading served a number of purposes in the lives of both male and female religious. It facilitated the education of the members of religious orders, indoctrinating them en masse in the tenets of the faith, the practices of the community, and the teachings of sacred scripture. Steven Fischer describes the “rhythmic, chant-like style of reading intended to exercise the mind and to commit holy texts to memory”⁸ which would have echoed through monastery and convent refectories. As Alberto Manguel notes, “the joy of the text was to be communal, not individual . . . the silence at table, the audience’s lack of response, was necessary not only to ensure concentration but also to preclude any semblance of private commentary on the sacred books.”⁹ Along with the assurance that the words of the Scripture and the Church Fathers were heard by all without extraneous commentary, the control of subject matter at meals ensured that the mind and the soul, as well as the body, received their required nourishment. Reading aloud also served the more general purpose of instilling discipline and concentration in the listener. Because religious were to “live together in oneness of mind and heart,”¹⁰ it was a form of group discipline that was sought through communal reading. Fischer underscores the importance of being read to as a form of “common indoctrination. It was not individual liberation, but communal submission, not unlike the text-read megaphone

⁸Fischer, *A History of Reading*, 93.

⁹Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 115.

¹⁰“The Rule of Our Holy Father St. Augustine,” I, viii

indoctrination of twentieth-century labour camps.”¹¹

Communal reading, especially in such a prescribed, ritualized manner, undoubtedly shaped not only the readers and listeners, but also the text itself. Manguel discusses the pros and cons of the practice:

The ceremony of being read to no doubt deprives the listener of some of the freedom inherent in the act of reading - choosing a tone, stressing a point, returning to a best-loved passage - but it also gives the versatile text a respectable identity, a sense of unity in time and an existence in space that it seldom has in the capricious hands of a solitary reader.¹²

The ‘versatile texts’ of religious life, shaped by the voices of their readers, were also placed in the hands of religious for prescribed individual reading. Though the choice of reading material was most often the prerogative of Superiors, religious through the ages - both male and female alike - have had the privilege of both literacy and private reading. In addition to listening to the readings at meals, those following Benedictine Rule were advised to read to themselves for prescribed periods of the day - three hours in the summer months, and two in the winter,¹³ which was, no doubt, a welcome reprieve for those for whom manual labour filled the balance of their waking hours. Augustinian Rule addressed two aspects of the distribution of books. One article noted that “those in charge of . . . books, should render cheerful service to their brothers,” while another warned that “books are to be requested at a fixed hour each day, and anyone coming outside that hour is not to receive them.”¹⁴ Not only was the content of reading materials controlled; so, too, was the distribution of books. This underscored that spiritual reading was a supervised privilege, and also ensured that the religious read only those works deemed appropriate by their wise Superiors.

¹¹Fischer, *A History of Reading*, 94.

¹²Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 123

¹³*Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁴“The Rule of Our Holy Father St. Augustine,” section V, articles ix, x.

In as much as the practice of spiritual reading involved regulations which exerted control over the routines, content and distribution of books, at the same time spiritual reading afforded the reader opportunities for intellectual and, most importantly, spiritual growth. As Manguel notes, in Western monotheistic traditions, or ‘religions of the Book’,

a scholar can turn religious faith into an active power through reading, since the knowledge acquired through the book is a gift from God. . . . Knowledge lies not in the accumulation of texts or information, nor in the object of the book itself, but in the experience rescued from the page and transformed again into experience, in the words reflected both in the outside world and in the reader’s own being.¹⁵

In the Christian tradition, the reading of sacred scripture, in particular, held the promise of transforming religious and brought the reader and/or listener into closer communion with God.

The Rules of both Benedict and Augustine had far-reaching effects on the reading practices of religious, shaping the communal instruction, private learning, daily horarium and spirituality of thousands of communities from the fifth century through to the present day. Additionally, it is important to note that religious communities were also influenced by Church regulations which sought to govern the reading habits of religious and laity alike. Most notable is the famed *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, or *Index of Forbidden Books*, initiated by the Sacred Congregation of the Roman Inquisition in 1559 as a means by which to censor the press, and maintained by the Roman Catholic Church until 1966. Over the centuries, the *Index* sought to restrict thousands of theological works, as well as countless secular writers, such as Voltaire, Locke, Diderot, Hume, and Kant, and, more recently, Colette, Jean Paul Sartre and Graham Greene.¹⁶ Consequently, convent libraries - and often

¹⁵Manguel, *The Library at Night*, 91.

¹⁶Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 287; also see “Index librorum prohibitorum, 1557-1966,” *Modern History Source Book*, ed. Paul Halsall, Fordham University, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/indexlibrorum.html>, accessed February 28, 2005. Although the *Index* has been discontinued since 1966, the Vatican continues to

the libraries of the high schools and colleges which were operated by religious communities - had vast gaps in their collections when compared to secular libraries. Not only did regulations regarding the practice of spiritual reading govern the reading habits of women religious, but the broader ecclesial censorship employed until the post-Vatican II era also affected their access to literature.

Reading Traditions of the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters

The preceding discussion of the origins of the practice of spiritual reading is pertinent to an understanding of its place in the lives of women religious in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. Both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities have been guided from the time of their foundations by the Rule of St. Augustine and, therefore, both communities have strong legacies of both communal and individual spiritual reading built upon the precepts laid out in Augustinian Rule. Elaborating on the previously mentioned practices outlined in the Rule of St. Augustine, the Ursulines' 1917 *Constitutions* and the Holy Name Sisters' 1939 *Book of Customs* (drawing on their *Constitutions* of 1911) provide specific guidelines for appropriate literature and reading practices, and for the processes of communal and individual spiritual reading for these particular women's communities as practised from their nineteenth-century foundations through the first half of the twentieth century.

The Ursuline *Constitutions* offer instruction on both the general content of reading materials and on the act of reading itself. In both arenas, the Superior General held ultimate authority. Even for purposes of study, the *Constitutions* forbade the reading of non-religious texts without permission. Article 75 states: "They may neither have nor read without

assert authoritative influence over publications it deems inappropriate for the faithful, as evident in the statements in 2003 of the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) condemning the Harry Potter series. Ratzinger warned that the popular children's books "deeply distort Christianity in the soul, before it can grow properly." Quoted in Manguel, *The Library at Night*, 116.

permission of the Superior any profane book or writing, even when such is necessary for their studies and teaching.”¹⁷ Because they were a teaching order, the Ursuline sisters would have made frequent appeals to the Superior for permission to read profane texts. As previously mentioned, the *Index of Forbidden Books* blacklisted the works of countless scientists, philosophers, playwrights and authors of fiction, and teachers would have required access to such works in order to fulfil the demands of the curricula, particularly at the high school and college levels.

Similarly, the Holy Names’ sisters were restricted in the reading material permitted them. Sister Gloria, who holds both an undergraduate degree and additional secondary-school teaching certifications in History, recalled of the mid- to late 1950s: “I did a lot of research in history, and I read a lot that might not have passed the test if people had known what I was reading.” Clearly, although there were proscriptions against certain topics or titles, at least some sisters avoided full disclosure to their Superiors in order to ensure that they could read in areas of interest. Those who studied at secular universities, like Sister Gloria who studied at the University of Toronto, would perhaps have had greater opportunity to circumvent proscriptions regarding secular reading.

With regard to communal spiritual reading, article 178 of the Ursuline *Constitutions* recommended the following: “During meals great silence shall generally be observed . . . And in order that the spirit may be nourished at the same time as the body, some pious book or edifying history shall be read, to which all shall listen attentively.”¹⁸ This included readings from the Roman Martyrology, the reading of the Rule of St. Augustine, and the reading of the Constitutions themselves “at least at the quarter tenses,” or four times per

¹⁷*The Rule and Constitutions of the Institute of the Religious of St. Ursula, of the Diocese of London, Ontario*, 1915, article 75, p. 32. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, art. 178.

year.¹⁹ The Ursuline Constitutions also stipulated that the daily horarium must include an additional fifteen minutes of spiritual reading in common and fifteen minutes of private reading.²⁰ The pre-Vatican II horaria of both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities listed set times for ‘meditation’ and ‘spiritual reading’, respectively. (See Appendix 5.)

The Holy Names Sisters’ *Book of Customs* provided similar instructions for daily spiritual reading. The Constitutions of the community were to be read daily by the Superior, an article or two at a time, and sisters absent from communal spiritual reading were admonished that they “shall not fail to read privately, each day, at least one number from the Constitutions.” Further, at least two times per year the Constitutions were to be read aloud in their entirety over a period of eight days.²¹

Like the Ursulines, the Holy Names Sisters kept the tradition of reading aloud at meals. Articles 238 and 239 of the *Book of Customs* outline the procedures for reader and listeners during reading in the refectory. After prayer before meals, the following ritual was to be followed:

. . . the reader, standing, says from her place at the reading-desk, *Jube, domne, benedicere*. The Superior, or the presiding Sister, recites the words of the benediction, during which the Sisters incline. Then, all take seats except the reader who remains standing while she reads the day’s gospel. No one shall walk about, or move from her place until the reading of the gospel has ended.

After the gospel, the reader says: *Hail Mary, conceived without sin, the honor of our people*; the Sisters respond: *Let us rejoice on this day which the Lord has made*. Not until then do the Sisters who are seated at table, turn back their outer sleeves and unfold their napkins. At the same time the service of the table begins. When the gavel falls, the reader commences to read the life of the saint whose festival is set for the morrow. This is followed by a selection

¹⁹Ibid., art. 371.

²⁰Ibid., art. 206.

²¹*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, 1939, articles 2, 3, S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

from some edifying book previously chosen by the Superior.²²

Strongly recommended among these “edifying” works were selections from the fifteenth-century devotional text, *Imitation of Christ*;²³ also, a work of ascetical theology, *Christian Perfection*, by Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J., was advised.²⁴ Both of these texts sought to shape the devotional attitudes and behaviours of the sisters. In addition to attending to the readings at meals, the Holy Names Sisters were also read to during scheduled Recreation, during which it was customary to “occupy oneself with needlework or knitting.”²⁵

All sisters who participated in the oral history project noted the practice of communal spiritual reading as a significant aspect of pre-Vatican II convent culture. Sister Patricia Anne, who had entered the Ursuline community in the early 1940s, commented that being “‘read at’ at meals. . . didn’t hurt us.” She accepted the practice of communal spiritual reading as part and parcel of religious life. Sister Patricia Anne went on to reminisce about her assigned task as reader during mealtimes: “I always read on Thursdays, and we always had the Rule of St. Augustine - it was always read on Thursdays - so I could do it with the book closed (*laughter*).”²⁶ Certainly, this sister’s comments attest to the effectiveness of the Augustinian regulation that the Rule should be read weekly to ensure that the sisters would “neglect no point through forgetfulness.”²⁷ At the same time as daily communal reading provided a sense of predictability, the rhythm of the weekly reading schedule served to

²²Ibid., art. 238, 239.

²³Ibid., art. 274.

²⁴Ibid., art. 88.

²⁵Ibid., art. 90.

²⁶Patricia Anne Turner, O.S.U., interview by author, 8 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

²⁷“The Rule of Our Holy Father St. Augustine,” section VIII, article ii.

punctuate the routines of convent life, as evident in Sister Patricia's comments regarding Thursdays.

With regard to individual spiritual reading, The Holy Name Sisters' *Book of Customs* also specifies a "Method for Reading the Rule and Meditating on it with Fruit," imparted to the community by Bishop Ignatius Bourget in 1853:

1. Before beginning, recall your wandering thoughts... What am I about to do?
2. Prayer... O my God, grant that I may understand, love, and practice my holy Rules.
3. Read a paragraph, reflect... endeavor to make it fruitful to your soul. These Constitutions come from God, Himself... They are, as it were, a letter sent to me from Heaven... They have cost and inspired many a sacrifice in this very house...How many have become Holy by observing them!... Cannot I do as my elders have done?...My Constitutions!... Are they a sweet yoke?... a light burden?... Am I penetrated with their meaning?... Have I above all things "the spirit that giveth life"?... Do I not rest content with "the letter that killeth"?
4. End by a fervent colloquy with our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, our guardian Angels, Patron Saints of the Community, the Founders and Foundresses, our Sisters gone before, etc. Address them in turn as your heart dictates... Humble yourself for your shortcomings... Ask for pardon... Promise to amend... Praise Almighty God... Admire the lives of those who are faithful... Thus, we may live and hold converse with our Sisters who, having sanctified their lives through these Constitutions, are now enjoying the eternal rest obtained by the austere labors of the religious life.
Mark your failings on your journal, any especially that attack the spirit of the rule; erase this record only when you have amended on these points.
5. Take the Constitutions, from time to time, as the subject of particular examen, and be faithful in the performance of this holy exercise.²⁸ [ellipses in original]

Bourget's instructions ensured that individual spiritual reading was approached with a sense of purpose, reverence, and ritual, and that it became part of the examination of conscience required in the religious life of the sisters. This ensured that the sisters' private reading was

²⁸*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, 1939, article 5. S.N.J.M. Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

conducted uniformly, and that it served to underscore a corporate spirituality which emphasized obedience and contrition. Further, the aforementioned prescriptions' emphasis on the uniformity of the practice among the sisters, and the recourse to prayers to 'guardian Angels,' 'Patron Saints of the Community,' 'the Founders and Foundresses,' and to Holy Names Sisters 'gone before', underscored the communal nature of meditation on spiritual reading and promised that the precepts read would be honoured by all Holy Names Sisters in perpetuity.

Apart from assigned communal and private spiritual reading, and the reading that would have been required of the sisters in their studies and in their work as teachers, sisters had access to very little in the way of reading material. Personal letters, therefore, were quite significant in that they were a departure from prescribed spiritual texts and work-related reading. However, like all other reading materials, letters were subject to regulation by the communities' Superiors. The Holy Names and the Ursuline communities imposed restrictions on the reading and writing of letters, with regard to both the content of the letters and the frequency with which mail might be sent and received. The Holy Names Sisters were allowed to write to their families four times per year, excluding the seasons of Advent and Lent, except with special permission of the Superior.²⁹ All in-coming and out-going mail was to be opened and closed by the General or Provincial Superior of the Mother House, or by the local Superior where sisters were living in smaller convents.³⁰ It is evident that, in the Holy Names community, these regulations were enforced even in the early 1960s, as an article in the Acts of the 1961 General Chapter notes that "the correspondence of a certain number of Sister is too voluminous, especially at Christmas, New Year's and Easter. It must

²⁹Ibid., art. 194, 195, 196.

³⁰Ibid., art. 199.

be diminished.”³¹

The Ursuline Sisters’ letters were subject to very similar regulations regarding censorship until 1967,³² and their Constitutions included the advice that the Superior who opened and closed the in-coming and out-going mail “may read one and the other, but she will prudently keep their contents secret.”³³ It was, however, the prerogative of both the Holy Names and Ursuline Superiors to withhold or to refuse to send mail which was deemed inappropriate, or to edit any in-coming mail which they felt might undermine the spiritual or temporal discipline of the sisters in their charge. The Holy Names Sisters’ *Book of Customs* includes a further instruction to Superiors, stating that “letters hurtful to the Institute, or tending to diffuse an evil influence among the Sister should be sent to the Mother House.”³⁴ Presumably, this would result in a reprimand for the offending sister or, at the very least, it would taint her reputation with her Superiors.

Sisters were reminded of their duty to send only ‘prudent’ communications home: “The Sisters should be convinced that in sending a letter, they send a portrait of themselves. This will render them very prudent in all written communications.”³⁵ These strict regulations surrounding letters not only preserved the sanctity of convent life by restricting inappropriate information, but it also left almost no opportunity for sisters to enjoy open communication

³¹*Acts and Recommendations of the 1961 General Chapters of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, p. 19. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario,

³²*Minutes of the 1967 Extraordinary General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*. Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

³³*The Rule and Constitutions of the Institute of the Religious of St. Ursula*, art. 87.

³⁴*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, 1939, art. 204.

³⁵*Ibid.*, art. 197.

with family members or friends. One must wonder about the degree to which sisters and their families had to ‘read between the lines’ at times in order to discern the original intent of the letters they received.

The Ursulines’ Constitutions and the Holy Names’ Book of Customs are reflective of the forms and content of reading practised from the communities’ foundings to the Vatican II era, the intended effects of both communal and private reading, and the degree to which the regulations which surrounded the practice of reading played a role in the daily lives of women religious. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the seeds of change were germinating. The written records of both the Ursuline and Holy Names communities reveal that the 1950s and ’60s brought new concerns about certain aspects of the practice of reading. When asked to reflect on this period, the sisters whose oral histories inform this work spoke candidly of their reading experiences in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council and their narratives, alongside Chapter minutes and acts from this period, offer important insights regarding the processes of change in this area of their daily lives in the 1950s and 60s.

Sisters and Reading in the Years Surrounding the Second Vatican Council

In the early years of pre-conciliar reform, Pope Pius XII issued the following statement to Superiors of teaching communities:

Give them with great liberality all they need, especially in what concerns books, so that even later they will be able to keep up with the progress of their science or their subject, and thus offer to young people a rich and solid harvest of knowledge.³⁶

The implementation of this directive was left to the discretion of General Superiors, however,

³⁶“‘Religious Life and Teaching’: Allocution to teaching Sisters, September 13, 1951,” in *The States of Perfection*, Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, eds. (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1967. 1967) 414.

and the regulations regarding reading as prescribed in the Constitutions and Books of Customs of the Holy Names and Ursuline Sisters remained virtually unchanged in the first half of the twentieth century. Still, there is evidence that, by the 1950s, some sisters were beginning to indulge in reading materials other than those prescribed by their Superiors.

In the Acts of their 1951 Chapter, the Holy Names Sisters were warned of the “spirit of sensuality which can filter into our communities by means of . . . newspapers [and] magazines.”³⁷ In her Report to the 1957 General Chapter the Ursuline’s Superior General mentioned in regard to individual spiritual reading that “books should be chosen carefully,” and she warned that it was “not wise” to read magazine articles as books are a “more complete medium through which God speaks.”³⁸ Clearly, magazines were regarded as a lesser medium than books in pre-Vatican II convent culture. While books were thought to be spiritually edifying, a medium through which God might be revealed, magazines, in their promotion of a ‘spirit of sensuality’, were considered a negative, worldly influence. Books - more traditional and lasting - were accepted; magazines - new, modern and disposable - were suspect. Whether admonitions against magazines was made in order to curtail unauthorized reading, or whether these were simply a means by which to ensure continued control over the sisters’ reading, it would seem that the issue of reading magazine articles was of importance as it was acknowledged in important pronouncements to the community. In 1961, the Holy Names sisters were advised that “magazines must always be submitted to the Superior for

³⁷*Acts and Recommendations of the 1951 General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, Mother House, Outremont, p. 3. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

³⁸*Minutes of the 1957 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

approval.”³⁹ Again, particular mention of magazines within an official directive indicates that this persisted as a contentious issue in the years immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council.

Further concerns regarding the reading of magazines were addressed at the Ursulines’ 1963 General Chapter. An amendment was made to the regulations regarding the sisters’ conduct in the offices of doctors, dentists, and oculists: “They will not read the papers or magazines found in any of these offices, but they may take a book from home to read while waiting.”⁴⁰ This ‘B.Y.O.B.’ (bring your own book) regulation was listed under the heading “Regulations for Personal Conduct.” This suggests that it was not only the *content* of the magazines that may have been deemed unsuitable (though this was almost surely the case); but the *format* was also considered inappropriate, somehow compromising the public image of women religious. While thumbing through magazines in doctors’ waiting rooms was considered inappropriate, bringing along a book approved by their Superior was deemed more suitable. Relatedly, the Holy Names Sisters’ Book of Customs, in a subsection on “Journeys” recommends that “when travelling by boat . . . it is expedient to have a book, or some light handiwork.”⁴¹ Neither primarily for spiritual edification nor intellectual stimulation, in this case reading served as a barrier between travelling sisters and seculars they would encounter while travelling. In both instances, the purpose of reading in public had more to do with appropriate behaviour and public image than it did with the

³⁹*Acts and Recommendations of the 1961 General Chapters of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, p.22.

⁴⁰“Regulations”, *Minutes of the 1963 General Chapter*, article 37. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁴¹*Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, 1962, article 212.

aforementioned spiritual purposes of reading, such as education, indoctrination and communal discipline.

Given that the issue of reading magazines was raised at the Ursuline General Chapters of '57 and '63, and the Holy Name Chapter of 1961, it is interesting to speculate that the popularity of magazines among secular women also impacted women religious in the period. The portability of magazines, the fact that they provided very current information, and the ease with which they might be shared would have made the medium very appealing for lay women and religious alike. Because it is likely that women who entered the community in the 1950s would have read popular women's magazines, such as *Chatelaine*, in their family homes,⁴² it is probable that the sisters' interest in such periodicals would have continued through the '50s and '60s, tempting them to peek at accessible copies in doctors' offices.

Also introduced at the 1957 Chapter was a motion to clarify the role of the Sister Librarian at the Ursuline community's Brescia College in London, Ontario, with regard to banned books:

She will see to it that all books on the *Index of Forbidden Books* which may be advisable to keep in the library will be put away in a locked cupboard, and she will be responsible for attaining from the proper authority and renewing whenever necessary the permission to keep these books.⁴³

We can only speculate as to whether this clarification of the Librarian's duties was due to controversies which had arisen in the years immediately preceding the 1957 Chapter.

Perhaps sisters who were teaching at the college had read books from the *Index* as part of

⁴²See Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) for an account of the significance and widespread popularity of *Chatelaine* in Canada in the period.

⁴³*Minutes of the 1957 General Chapter*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

their professional reading without first obtaining permission; or perhaps students at the women's college, who often also took courses on the main campus of the University of Western Ontario, were reading them in the Brescia Library, thereby inciting concern. Whatever the case, this concern regarding the control of reading materials is significant. It not only reveals that there was some anxiety surrounding the issue, but such a concern also indicates that tensions existed in the pre-conciliar era regarding reading and religious life, and in this way such commentary foreshadows the official reforms to regulatory practices which followed in the next decade.

The oral narratives of the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters indicate that a some women felt a desire for change to the traditional spiritual reading regulations and practices of convent life in the pre-conciliar era. Some sisters who entered in the postwar period, it seems, had never really adjusted to the reading rituals and restrictions of convent culture. Sister Anne, who entered the Ursuline community at age 19 in 1956, remembers the difficulty she had in adjusting to religious life, particularly where reading was concerned. She had grown up in a middle-class family where education and knowledge were prized, and she recalled that "the hardest thing that we found in the . . . training years was that you had *nothing to read*." She, and others like her, found ways to circumvent the proscription against unassigned secular reading material. Sister Frances noted that the sisters assigned to kitchen duty would sometimes read the newspapers provided for the purpose of wrapping vegetable peelings.⁴⁴ Sister Anne, whose story forms the basis for the Prologue of this thesis, explained that the young sisters were often assigned manual labour, and those who washed the floors were instructed to spread newsprint over the freshly washed areas in the event that someone might walk across the clean convent foyer. She admitted that she and others "used to read

⁴⁴Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author, 4 October 2004, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

the newspapers that were spread out on the floor that we had scrubbed.”⁴⁵ She felt that one of the biggest changes in the Vatican II era was that the sisters “got access to stuff to read.”⁴⁶

Sister Gloria recalled that in her first years with the Holy Names sisters in the mid-fifties, “as novices we didn’t read newspapers or hear about the news in the outside world.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Sister Frances indicated that distinctions among groups of sisters within the Ursuline community determined access to reading materials. Those in the novitiate - that is, those who had not yet made their first vows - were “never allowed to read newspapers.” Yet, she noted that “when we were in the juniorate we were all out teaching and we had to read things.”⁴⁸ This confirms that the Constitutional regulations pertaining to permission from Superiors to read restricted texts were, indeed, exercised.

The previous comments refer to distinctions based in age, but they also imply a distinction between those in the community who were working as teachers and those who worked within the convent. For example, the housekeepers’ roles in the community would not have required those sisters to have knowledge of current events, therefore secular reading would have been much less accessible to them.⁴⁹ Sister Gloria, when asked if the Holy

⁴⁵Other accounts of sisters’ surreptitious reading of the newspapers include Joan Chittister’s admission that “we rushed to wrap the kitchen garbage in order to get a glimpse of last week’s headlines.” Joan Chittister, *The Way We Were*, 77.

⁴⁶Anne Denomy, O.S.U. interview by author, 26 October 2004, Stratford, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁴⁷Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 22 November 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

⁴⁸Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

⁴⁹The housekeeping duties of religious communities were shared among the sisters, with much of the manual labour and food preparation carried out by the young postulants and novices. Sister-housekeepers managed the larger convents, overseeing the cleaning, general maintenance and kitchens. In the pre-conciliar era, housekeepers were less educated than their teaching counterparts. The selection

Names sister-housekeepers would have had access to newspapers replied, “Well, I don’t think they would have - maybe they didn’t want to. I don’t know. The newspaper was there, and if you made enough fuss, you could read it. And if you were the type that didn’t make a fuss, well maybe you didn’t get to read it.”⁵⁰ Although the Constitutions and Customs of the communities outlined that sisters might have access to secular reading material with permission of the Superior, it would seem that, in practice, this was not so easily defined or regulated, and that a form of class distinction within the community also played a role in the regulation of reading materials. Sister Gloria’s comment that those who “made enough fuss” were the ones who were afforded permission to read the paper indicates that not only those with ‘class’ privilege, but perhaps also those with more assertive personalities were more able to attain permission to read restricted materials.

Relatedly, Ursuline sisters also noted distinctions between the experiences of those living at Brescia College and those living at the Mother House or in smaller convents. Sister Sheila, who spent her years as a novice at Brescia in the 1960s, observed differences between life in the convent connected to the College and the routines of the Chatham Mother House, “The Pines.”

At the Pines there was silence at the meals, there wasn’t much talking in the house, and there were very clear divisions between the various levels of formation. . . . Although there was silence at meals (at Brescia) it was usually for the first ten minutes while people did reading, and then once the reading

process for housekeepers may have had to do with intellectual ability, such that young women who did not demonstrate academic competence would have been assigned as housekeepers; another possibility is that those whose domestic or managerial skills were particularly strong were assigned to such occupations. In the Ursuline and Holy Names communities, sister-housekeepers were encouraged to pursue further education in the conciliar and post-conciliar eras.

⁵⁰Gloria Drouillard, S.N.J.M., interview by author.

was finished you could talk.⁵¹

Perhaps the College environment was generally more progressive and, therefore, the regulations surrounding spiritual reading at meals were more quickly revised. The fact that silence at meals was dispensed of *before* spiritual reading at meals was abolished may have provided an opportunity for women to discuss the readings of the day, had they chosen to do so. This would imply a drastic change in the traditional purpose of spiritual reading as a means by which to indoctrinate women religious without mediation or extraneous commentary on the text.

In the Ursuline community, sisters were granted permission to choose their own books for spiritual reading in 1963,⁵² and at the 1967 Extraordinary General Chapter the practice of reading in common at meals was discontinued.⁵³ Although sisters report that, in practice, assigned personal reading and communal spiritual reading was gradually phased out in the Holy Names community, it is not mentioned in their Chapter Minutes until 1971, with a recommendation that “each sister choose the time and the form which best favor her individual prayer” and that she “respect the . . . choices of her sisters.” Further, the Acts of Chapter recommend that “the sisters give to mental prayer and spiritual reading sufficient time to lead them toward a closer union with Christ.” Assigned content, place and time for spiritual reading were officially discontinued by this revision to the community’s regulations. It is important to note that the freedom to choose one’s own books would have been a very

⁵¹Sheila McKinley, O.S.U., interview by author, 1 November 2001, Chatham, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁵²*Minutes of the 1963 General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

⁵³*Minutes of the 1967 Extraordinary General Chapter, Chatham, Ontario*, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

different experience for sisters in small convents in rural communities compared to those sisters in larger convents with their own libraries. Further, sisters who taught at community-run high schools and colleges would have had far greater access to a much broader range of reading materials. Over time, convent libraries would expand to include more up-to-date titles; in the immediate conciliar period, however, a sister's choice in reading was quite dependent on her geographic location.

Reflective of changes in the regulations of spiritual reading in the period is the marked increase in the number of references made in both the oral histories of the sisters and in the textual records of communities to the reading of current theological publications during the Vatican II years and the period immediately following. Until the late 1950s, the sisters' spiritual reading was drawn largely from traditional devotional texts. The previously mentioned *Imitation of Christ* and *Christian Perfection*, as well as *The Roman Martyrology* and *The Lives of the Saints*, were customary titles. Additionally, devotional works on community foundresses, individual saints, Mary, and various books on prayer were often recommended. By the early 1960s, community memos, meeting minutes, and community chronicles make numerous references to the 'new' theologians and Church scholars of the day, some of whom were sisters themselves, and this shift in content and authorship incited a radical change in reading habits of both the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters.

During the oral history collection, when asked about the literature that most influenced them personally in the Vatican II era, it was not surprising that sisters remembered what they had been reading at the time with varying degrees of clarity. Some sisters were able to list numerous authors and titles by genre, and some even recalled where they were when they read specific books! Still, even those whose memories were not so vivid were able to note at least a few titles and/or authors from the period, and it was easy to see that by

the mid-1960s the genre of sisters' reading had changed appreciably, with contemporary theologians, such as Teilhard deJardins, Yves Congar, and Hans Kung mentioned frequently.⁵⁴ Not surprising, but very interesting, was the sisters' frequent mention of feminist theologians from the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary T. Malone, Mary Jo Weaver, Joan Chittister and Sandra Schneiders. It is understandable that when trying to recall what they were reading in the 1960s and '70s, some sisters would conflate this era's authors and titles with those of later decades. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to speculate as to if and how the sisters see the Vatican II-era theological literature as meaningful precursors to their reading of feminist scholars in later decades.

For the purposes of this study, three of the titles most frequently mentioned by the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters will be discussed in some detail in the remainder of this Chapter, with regard to both their content and influence. Although this approach offers a limited perspective on the content of spiritual reading in the period, it is reflective of the typical reading habits of the Ursulines and Holy Names in the conciliar and post-conciliar period, and is also indicative of the popular titles read by many women religious in North America. First, mentioned by *all* oral history participants, is Cardinal Joseph Suenens's 1962 book, *The Nun in the World*. Next, almost all sisters mentioned a periodical popular in the 1950s and '60s, *Review for Religious*. Finally, many sisters reported reading the *Documents of Vatican II* themselves, as they were released by the Council. Although the

⁵⁴Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., controversial for his radical beliefs regarding cosmology and evolution, was denied Vatican approval during his lifetime. deChardin died in 1955, but by the mid-1960s his work was widely read, especially his 1959 work, *The Phenomenon of Man*; Yves Congar, O.P., and Hans Kung, participants in the Second Vatican Council, were both widely read for their influential work on ecumenism in the period, despite the fact that both have endured periods of greater and lesser favour with Vatican authorities over their theological careers.

content of the conciliar documents pertinent to religious life has been discussed earlier in this thesis, the sisters' descriptions of reading these documents are revealing in and of themselves, and are therefore worthy of special mention in this discussion of the spiritual reading of the period. Taken together, these three titles demonstrate that reform to the content of spiritual reading resulted in an experience of reading that was women-centred, diverse and evolving, and timely and unmediated.

Since its publication in 1962 in the midst of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens's *The Nun in the World*, originally published in French as *La Promotion Apostolique de la Religieuse*, has been praised as among the most influential books for sisters in the period. In a survey of theological writings from 1950 to 1980, American historian Philip Gleason notes that *The Nun in the World* "was read by virtually every American nun."⁵⁵ Elizabeth Kolmer regards *The Nun in the World* as a seminal text for and about women religious in the period, arguing that Suenens's book was the forerunner of a group of publications concerning the religious life for women in the post-conciliar world.⁵⁶

Suenens's reputation as a high-profile cleric of the Second Vatican Council no doubt influenced the popularity of *The Nun in the World*. Born in Brussels in 1904, Suenens was ordained to the priesthood in 1927. He earned doctoral degrees in philosophy and theology, held the positions of Professor and later Vice-Rector at the University of Louvain, and served

⁵⁵Philip Gleason, "A Browser's Guide to American Catholicism, 1950-1980," *Theology Today*, Vol. 38, no. 3, p. 378-388, <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/oct1981/v38-3-article9.htm>, accessed 10 January 2007.

⁵⁶Kolmer, *Religious Women in the United States*, 45-46. This group of publications to which Kolmer refers, published subsequent to the Council, include monographs such as two popular collections of essays edited by Sister Charles Borromeo Muckenirn, *The Changing Sister* (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1965), and *The New Nuns* (New York: The New American Library, 1967).

as a chaplain in the Belgian army during World War II. Appointed Archbishop of Malines in 1961 and Primate of Belgium in 1962, Cardinal Suenens served as one of the four official moderators of the Second Vatican Council,⁵⁷ exacting much influence over the agenda and proceedings of the Council sessions. According to theologian Joseph A. Komonchak, “Apart from Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Suenens would rank among the two or three most important leaders of the Council.”⁵⁸ Suenens’s direct participation in the Council and his outspoken and progressive stance regarding the place of women at the council sessions would have afforded *The Nun in the World* great credibility. As Mary Luke Tobin recalled, Suenens made a public statement at the close of the second session of the Council, asking his fellow bishops, “Why are we even discussing the reality of the church when half the church is not even represented here?”⁵⁹ His willingness to speak out with regard to the gross under-representation at the Council and his reputation as a woman-friendly cleric no doubt further bolstered Suenens’s popularity among women religious around the world, ensuring the widespread influence of his book.

Because Suenens uses non-inclusive language, introducing his treatise on nuns in the

⁵⁷For further biographical information on Suenens, and for a bibliography of Suenens’s theological publications, see Elizabeth Hamilton, *Cardinal Suenens: A Portrait* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975). Also see Suenens’s *Biographical Profile* at the Cardinal Suenens Centre Website, John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio at <http://www.jcu.edu/suenens/suenens.htm>, accessed 15 February 2007.

⁵⁸Peter Steinfels, “Leo Joseph Cardinal Suenens, A Vatican II Leader, Dies at 91,” *The New York Times*, Tuesday, May 7, sec. B, p. 7. TimesSelect Archive, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F30B16FE3E5D0C748CDDAC0894DE494D81>, accessed 20 February 2007.

⁵⁹Mary Luke Tobin, “Women in the Church Since Vatican II,” *America* (November 1, 1986), 243.

1960s with a discourse on the experience of “the man [of] today,”⁶⁰ *The Nun in the World* may seem antiquated to the twenty-first-century reader.⁶¹ It was, however, unparalleled in its day, and in a departure from the traditional language of its introduction, subsequent chapters of Suenens’s work address the historical and contemporary struggles of women in the Church. Although critical of twentieth-century feminism’s stance on abortion, contraception and divorce,⁶² Suenens, quoting Lenin, argues: “The experience of all movements of liberation proves that the success of a revolution depends upon the degree of participation by women.”⁶³ For the ecclesial reform of the conciliar era to succeed, posited Suenens, massive renewal of women’s religious communities was needed, noting that change must occur to the ubiquitous customs and practices “which make the religious seem in the eyes of the faithful to be living outside the world they are trying to serve, to be lagging behind the general progress of women.”⁶⁴ Suenens put forth that women religious must address the psychological, social and apostolic dimensions of their communities in order that

⁶⁰Joseph Suenens, *The Nun in the World*, (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1962), 2.

⁶¹In *Visual Habits*, Rebecca Sullivan offers an appraisal of influential literature about women in the early 1960s which places discussion of Suenens’s book alongside that of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, and Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl*, noting Suenens’s “explicit embrace of feminism and encouragement of women’s independence both in the Catholic Church and in society.” However, in her comparative analysis Sullivan draws the conclusion that “while his book held the promise of a more commanding presence for women in the Catholic Church, it remained steadfastly grounded in traditional idealizations of gender” (Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 36-7). Because of their very different authors and audiences, Sullivan’s comparisons seem misplaced and, although she is correct in her comment regarding Suenens’s traditional ideas regarding gender, she fails to acknowledge Suenens’s willingness to address the need for change in women’s communities in the very early years of conciliar Catholicism as revolutionary for its time and context.

⁶²Suenens, *The Nun in the World*, 13.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 16.

they might be effective in the modern world, and he did so in language that was both candid and instructive:

The religious of today appears to the faithful to be out of touch with the world as it is, an anachronism. She seems to be behind times in relation to other women, who have achieved emancipation while she remains 'in the schoolroom.' To restore to the religious life its original value, we must put it in harmony with the progress which has been realized in the world, and in relation to that world. . . . she must be seen to be a modern woman.⁶⁵

While Suenens's stance on the place of women religious in the modern world and his view (albeit hazy) of what it means to be a 'modern woman' may seem, on one hand, authoritarian and patronizing, they were, in their day, novel and progressive within an ecclesial context. Because they came from a man of high rank within the Church hierarchy, statements supporting women religious in their processes of reform were likely considered all the more worthy of consideration. Indeed, published in seven languages, and read widely throughout North America and Europe, Suenens's *Nun in the World* was the definitive commentary on modern religious in the conciliar period.⁶⁶ With *The Nun in the World*, Suenens challenged women religious themselves to take up and personalize the mandates of the Council as women within the Church, affording them ownership in the implementation of reform. His book not only paved the way for further influential writing on the topic, but it also had great personal influence on individual women religious around the world as they sought to redefine

⁶⁵Ibid., 33-34.

⁶⁶Elizabeth Hamilton notes that *The Nun in the World* was published in seven languages. Hamilton, *Suenens: A Portrait*, 71. Exact publication information as to all countries and languages in which *The Nun in the World* was circulated is unavailable. The American Library of Congress houses limited information regarding English-language editions; Paulist Press, the publisher which assumed the rights to *The Nun in the World* upon the folding of the original Canadian publisher, Newman Press, does not have documentation regarding other original publishers. In consultation with the Cardinal Suenens Centre at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, I was able to confirm its circulation throughout Europe and North America, and its French and Italian translations.

themselves in the conciliar era.

In addition to *The Nun in the World*, the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters commonly reported having read *Review for Religious* regularly during the pre-conciliar and conciliar periods. Given the strict prohibitions against magazines in these communities, it seems somewhat paradoxical that *Review for Religious*, a periodical, was recognized by the sisters as among their most important reading of the 1950s and 60s.⁶⁷ Founded by the Jesuits of the Missouri Province in 1942, and still in publication today,

Review for Religious has never been identified as the publication of a particular school of spirituality or of one religious-life tradition. True to the vision of its founding editors, the journal has served all religious-life communities and at the same time has been a forum for the wide exchange of ideas and developments in the spiritual life and apostolic mission of the Catholic church itself.⁶⁸

Review for Religious stood out among references sisters made to reading materials in the Vatican II era for two reasons: not only because it is a periodical, but also for the endurance of its popularity across the decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

In addition to frequent mention in the oral narratives of the sisters themselves, *Review for Religious* is also cited in archival materials of Ursulines with articles noted as recommended readings for community Chapters and other meetings.⁶⁹ The articles cited in the Ursuline archives in the pre-conciliar and conciliar period parallel the thematic trends in

⁶⁷*Sponsa Regis*, which began publication in 1930 and underwent a name change in 1965 to *Sisters Today*, was also popular among sisters in the conciliar era. *Sisters Today* ceased publication in 2000.

⁶⁸*Review for Religious* On-line, <http://www.reviewforreligious.org/about.html>, accessed January 10, 2007.

⁶⁹It is likely that, because *Review for Religious* is American, and published exclusively in English, the bilingual Holy Names community did not use it as recommended reading; however, it was noted as popular reading among the English-speaking members of the Ontario Province.

Review generally. Although an issue by issue comparison of thematic trends in *Review for Religious*, published bimonthly throughout the fifties and sixties, is beyond the scope of this study, a comparison of the themes and authorship of articles in 1950 (as communities entered into pre-conciliar adaptations) and at the end of the conciliar decade in 1970, reveals marked shifts in emphases.

The *Review for Religious*, in its last issue of 1950, listed the following articles:

- “Politeness or Courtesy: The Little Virtues” by Stephen Brown, S.J.
- “All Honour and Glory” by C.A. Herbst, S.J.
- “A Contemplation of Christ in Daily Life” by R.J. Schneider, S.J.
- “The Deafened Religious” (no author named)
- “Religious Vocation: A Pledge of Heaven” by P. DeLetter, S.J.

In the final issue of 1970, the following articles were featured:

- “Collegiality and Subsidiarity: Theory, Application and Evaluation”, by William P. Sexton
- “Life Style Study: Convent Living” by Dorothy Coons, B.V.M.
- “Prayer is Listening” by Krisitin Shrader, R.S.M.
- “Psychology and Prayer of the Heart”, by John O. Meany and Marjorie Carey, B.V.M
- “Retirement Policy for Religious” by Richard M. McKeon, S.J.
- “The Sister as an Agent of Change” by Louis Tamaino
- “Some Notes on Hostility and Fidelity: The Religious Presence” by Jonathan Foster, O.F.M.
- “Spiritual Counselling and Prayer” by Richard P. Vaughan, S.J.
- “Toward a Definition of ‘Community’” by Kathryn Lindemann, O.P.

The differences between *Review*’s pre- and post-conciliar content are distinctive.

Traditional devotional and theological themes are reflected in the 1950 articles. Stephen Brown’s “Politeness or Courtesy” offers instruction on the importance of etiquette and the rules of common courtesy and how these are required by the Rules governing religious communities.⁷⁰ C.A. Herbst, in “All Honour and Glory,” examines the “virtue” of religion, and how religious might further develop this virtue via adherence to the traditional practices

⁷⁰Stephen Brown, “The Little Virtues: Politeness or Courtesy,” *Review For Religious*, vol. IX, no. 6 (November 15, 1950), 281-284.

of “devotion, prayer, adoration, sacrifice, and vows.”⁷¹ R.J. Schneider’s “A Contemplation of Christ in Daily Life” is a short reflection on how religious might ‘meet Christ’ in everyday life through devotion to their work.⁷² “Religious Vocation, a Pledge of Heaven” examines the centuries old belief that “perseverance in a religious vocation until death is a safe guarantee of eternal salvation.”⁷³ Finally, an article by an anonymous author, departing from the devotional tone of the other articles in the 1950 edition, offers information and advice on how religious might cope with hearing loss, and how religious communities ought to support their hearing impaired members by providing them with hearing aids and emotional support. Although the author is unnamed, it would seem from the pedantic tone and informational content of the piece that the author worked, perhaps in an educational setting, with the hearing impaired.⁷⁴ With the exception of “The Deafened Religious,” the themes of the articles focus on traditional aspects of religious life: adherence to aspects of Rules, development of virtues, prayer, contemplation and devotion to the religious life as a means to eternal salvation. Even the discussion of a more general topic, hearing impairment, has an inward focus; the author notes how individuals and communities might together cope with hearing loss, but does not refer to supports or educational resources which might be accessed in the secular world.

By the 1970s edition, *Review* had expanded into much less traditional concerns, and is reflective not only of the post-conciliar developments in religious life, but also of trends in

⁷¹C.A. Herbst, “All Honor and Glory,” *Review For Religious*, vol. IX, no. 6 (November 15, 1950), 287.

⁷²R.J. Schneider, “A Contemplation of Christ in Daily Life,” *Review For Religious*, vol. IX, no. 6 (November 15, 1950), 291-2.

⁷³P. DeLetter, “Religious Vocation, a Pledge of Heaven,” *Review For Religious*, vol. IX, no. 6 (November 15, 1950), 293.

⁷⁴“The Deafened Religious,” *Review For Religious*, vol. IX, no. 6 (November 15, 1950), 299-307.

secular society, such as those in psychology, retirement practices and the popularity of eastern religions. With regard to post-conciliar religious life, articles on prayer by Richard P. Vaughan, Kristin Shrader, and John O. Meany and Marjorie Carey, respectively, examine trends in “spiritual counseling” and prayer,⁷⁵ the influences of the theology of Karl Rahner and Thomas Merton on prayer in contemporary religious life,⁷⁶ and how practices of eastern religions, such as yoga, can augment traditional religious life.⁷⁷ In addition, and in contrast to the 1950 edition, new disciplinary approaches are employed by the 1970 authors: Kathryn Lindemann’s “Toward a Definition of Community” uses formal philosophical deductive reasoning to develop a definition of ‘community’ for post-conciliar communities;⁷⁸ in “Retirement Policy for Religious,” Richard M. McKeon acknowledges the increased life span of religious and the need for religious communities to “wake up” and “acquaint their older members with all facets of what retirement means,” drawing on contemporary business models to illustrate his points;⁷⁹ and a sociological study of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary examining their general satisfaction with community life is outlined in Dorothy Coons’s “Life Style Study: Convent Living.”⁸⁰ The broader themes and wider range of disciplinary approaches introduced by *Review* in the post-conciliar era both inform and

⁷⁵Richard P. Vaughan, “Spiritual Counseling and Prayer,” *Review For Religious*, vol. 29 (November, 1970), 803-808.

⁷⁶Kristin Shrader, “Prayer Is Listening,” *Review For Religious*, vol. 29 (November, 1970), 809-817.

⁷⁷John O. Meany and Marjorie Carey, “Psychology and ‘The Prayer of the Heart,’” *Review For Religious*, vol. 29 (November, 1970), 818-826.

⁷⁸Kathryn Lindemann, “Toward a Definition of ‘Community,’” *Review For Religious*, vol. 29 (November, 1970), 827-832.

⁷⁹Richard M. McKeon, S.J., “Retirement Policy for Religious,” *Review For Religious*, vol. 29 (November, 1970), 843-848.

⁸⁰Dorothy Coons, “Life Style Study: Convent Living.”

reflect a changing religious life for women in the period.

Review's authorship also underwent significant change from the pre- to post-conciliar period. In the index of the 1950 issue, all authors are Jesuit priests, with the exception of one unnamed author. By the 1970s, authors are drawn from among male and female religious and laity, and all are named. It is most likely that the earlier anonymous author was a woman who belonged to a religious community. A key development of the 1960s which is reflected in, but certainly not restricted to *Review for Religious*, is the emergence of writing on the religious life by women religious themselves in the conciliar era. Until the 1960s, most women's religious communities imposed severe restrictions on any form of individual ownership; in practice, this included ownership of intellectual property. Periodicals produced specifically for the vowed religious, like the popular periodical *Review for Religious*, either published sisters' articles anonymously, or used first names only (e.g., Sister Mary), or employed pseudonyms when publishing articles written by women religious. Not only did this protect the identities of those women who may have been, at the time, raising issues which challenged the then rigid regulations of Church and communities, but it also preserved notion of the 'I' as deferential to the 'we' in pre-Vatican II convent culture. Sister M. Charles Borromeo, C.S.C, renowned writer and editor of two widely-read collections of essays on women religious in the mid-1960s,⁸¹ noted that the sisters who were published in North America wrote under the censorship of their Superiors.⁸² In the preface to her 1967 anthology, she noted that "communities which are ahead of others can do a great service by

⁸¹M.C. Borromeo Muckenhirn, C.S.C., is contributor and editor to both *The Changing Sister* (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1965) and *The New Nuns* (New York: The New American Library, 1967), volumes widely read by sisters across North America. The contributors to these collections were also readily recognizable to most women religious as frequent contributors to popular religious journals, such as *America*, and to the mainstream secular press.

⁸²Muckenhirn, *The New Nuns*, 6.

encouraging their members to write honestly and openly. . . . The spirit of secrecy, of writing and talking only for one's own group, is completely foreign to the conciliar vision."⁸³ Sisters reading *Review for Religious* in the conciliar and post-conciliar era would likely have been very inspired to see women religious writing about the experiences and vision of women religious. The ongoing popularity of *Review* among sisters throughout a period of reform speaks to the diversity and evolution of the periodical itself and its ability to reflect the changes in the lived experience of religious life.

Also acknowledged by the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters in their oral narratives was the novelty of and excitement around reading the official Documents of Vatican II. Although the significance of the Documents themselves are discussed in earlier chapters on this thesis, the *act* of reading the Documents is worthy of mention with regard to the changes in the sisters' reading habits in the period. For example, Sister Dorothy recalled, "We were all given our own copy [of the conciliar documents]. I read it. I underlined it. I thought it was a wonderful thing that was happening, that these changes were coming about, and that . . . it was up to *me* to read about it and to make it my own!"⁸⁴ Similarly, Sister Patricia McLean recalled, "I would come home after teaching all day and *study* the documents." She described this as "intellectually exciting," and noted that the reforms which Vatican II initiated were things that she had been "thinking about for years."⁸⁵

In Sisters Dorothy and Patricia's comments, not only are the conciliar documents themselves perceived as 'wonderful' and 'exciting', but the *act of reading them* was also part of the excitement and novelty. That Sister Dorothy recalls *underlining* as she read, and that

⁸³Ibid, 9.

⁸⁴Dorothy Dean, S.N.J.M., interview by author, 3 December 2004, Windsor, Ontario, audiotape recording.

⁸⁵Patricia McLean, O.S.U., interview by author, 27 April 2005, London, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

Sister Patricia recalls *studying* the documents after school, are testaments to the fact that the unmediated experience of official Church documents was a novelty, and an act in which the women were engaged and focussed. Because ecclesial direction regarding such revolutionary reforms to religious life was not filtered through the dictates of General Superiors or local priests or bishops, sisters had an opportunity to engage, process and, as Sister Dorothy put it, ‘make them their own.’ Unmediated access to such documents in the immediate aftermath of the Council, empowered sisters in their commitment to and engagement of reform in the period.

Many Holy Names and Ursuline Sisters spoke enthusiastically about the freedom to choose their own reading as a key turning point in their lives in the conciliar era, as exemplified in Sister Anne’s comment: “The fact that you could *read*, that you could talk about those ideas, that was part of the gift of Vatican II.”⁸⁶ The influence of *The Nun in the World, Review for Religious* and *The Documents of Vatican II* on the lives of women religious is particularly salient in that, as significant titles in sisters’ reading, these address issues of gender, changing emphases in religious life, and the ability of sisters to personalize and internalize reform.

Conclusion

Changes in the practice of spiritual reading - permission to choose one’s reading, to read at one’s leisure and the availability of ‘new’ reading materials - was life changing for sisters. Sister Frances’s memories of reading in the mid-1960s provide an insightful summary of the aforementioned trends:

I was reading everything! . . . a lot of what you might call the more progressive works emerging from the Vatican Council. Like Congar, . . . Jesuit writers. . . much more ‘cutting edge’ theology. When Suenens came out with that little book on the religious life, I can see myself at Brescia reading that and talking about it. It was wonderful! And we were encouraged to keep

⁸⁶Anne Denomy, O.S.U., interview by author.

up - with every document, everything that came out, we'd sort of eat it up. It was always available to us at Brescia in the university setting - everything was right there.⁸⁷

Sister Frances' memory of reading at Brescia evokes a striking image, one which encapsulates the many changes experienced by women religious in the practice of spiritual reading.

First, Sister Frances "was reading everything!" This was a dramatic departure from the practice of spiritual reading being assigned by Superiors from a limited range of acceptable titles. She had access to a range of reading materials. She had the freedom to browse the stacks of the college library, or the convent common room, to select books of her choosing, and to read at her leisure. This is a sharp contrast to the reading practices of a mere decade earlier when sisters read and were read to from assigned texts at prescribed times each day.

Second, the theologians whose writings were inspired by the theology of Vatican II were an important part of her individual reading. The works of these scholars differ significantly in content, vision, and tone from the devotional and prescriptive communal reading of the pre-Vatican II years. The shift in emphases were significant for both community and individual spirituality. Spiritual reading moved from an emphasis on 'devotion' to an emphasis on 'prayer', from 'scriptural commentary' to 'scriptural scholarship' and the study of scripture itself, from a vision of 'Church as institution' to 'Church as the People of God', and it also included seminal scholarship in the area of liberation theology. Though the breadth of content inherent in post-conciliar spiritual reading is clearly beyond the scope of this study, a shift from traditional devotional reading to modern theological works was key to the sisters' personal and spiritual growth in the period.

Third, Sister Frances notes that she was "talking about" her reading with others.

⁸⁷Frances Ryan, O.S.U., interview by author.

Presumably, there were other sisters and possibly lay colleagues with whom she chose to share her thoughts. Gone were the days of assigned private reading and communal reading aloud from a common book. This freedom to privately read and then openly discuss what had been read was another important aspect of community life which facilitated supported individualism among women religious.

Fourth, Sister Frances notes that the sisters were “encouraged to keep up.” Not only did they have access to a breadth of scholarship, but they also felt that their Superiors and the larger community supported them in their private reading, learning and spiritual growth.

The connections between changes in spiritual reading practices and the increase in individualism in sisters are numerous. Through the freedom to read books selected by themselves and for themselves, through the increased freedom to read privately and at the time and place of their own choosing, and by exercising the option of discussing one’s spiritual reading with others, sisters broadened their self-understanding and began to develop previously unexplored dimensions of their spiritualities and their social lives. The detailed examination of these changes reveals a unique facet of Canadian feminism. By the middle to late sixties, at the same time as women in the secular sphere were beginning to expand their knowledge and self-awareness via the secular feminist movement, women religious also explored and developed previously uncharted aspects of their lives via the transformation of their spiritual reading practices.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions typically begin with a promise to foster integration, or at the very least, some semblance of intellectual accounting, so to begin this concluding chapter with a discussion of ‘dismemberment’ seems, at best, bold, and, at worst, foolhardy. Nonetheless, as I asserted in the Introduction to this thesis, I am persuaded by Mary Daly’s assertion that women, historically, have experienced “dismemberment” or disconnection from their own histories,¹ and I claimed from the outset of this work that the central responsibility of this thesis would be to record and analyse the process of a moving from dehistoricization to historicization - that is, ‘re-membering’ - as experienced by women religious during the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council. Therefore the pressing questions as the reckoning begins are: *Did the sisters themselves move beyond ‘dismemberment’ in the radical reforms undertaken in the conciliar period?*; and, *Have I, the historian, done anything herein to further that re-membering, or to stimulate further historical inquiry regarding women religious in Canada?*

The Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters did, indeed, enter into meaningful and consequential processes of re-membering in the Vatican II era. This is evident in three distinct themes which emerge from the research. First, there is a clear relationship between Church-initiated adaptations and reforms and subsequent changes in these women’s religious communities in the period. The sisters’ interest, excitement - and even their anxieties - around ecclesial reforms to seemingly out-dated traditions of religious life reflect not only sisters’ commitments to fully enter into experimentation processes and to actively negotiate regulatory reforms within their respective communities, but also an engagement with the

¹Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: the metaethics of radical feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 23.

broader project of Church reform. Their reconsiderations of the needs of their members, the visions of their foundresses and, perhaps most importantly, the signs of the times led to appreciable changes in convent culture in the post-conciliar period.

Second, combined efforts of ‘unofficial’ and ‘official’ reforms worked together in women’s religious communities to enable change. Changes which occurred first at the grassroots level - sometimes subversively or surreptitiously - not only served to pave the way for formal ecclesial reform initiatives, but they also served to strengthen the Ursuline and Holy Names communities in the pre-conciliar era, preparing the women themselves for the sweeping reforms enacted in the mid- to late 1960s. Although the twenty-first-century historian would be remiss to view this as simply part and parcel of early, incipient second-wave feminism, given that ‘unofficial’ reform began as early as the 1950s, such grassroots, self-guided, radical, women-centred action is worthy of consideration as Canadian historians examine changes in women’s roles over the course of the postwar period. The experiences of the Ursuline and Holy Names sisters reveal that even before the era of second-wave feminism, and even in highly-regulated convent culture, women religious transgressed official regulations and cultural prohibitions, negotiating ‘unofficial’ change well before ‘official’ changes were initiated. This not only calls into question suppositions and stereotypes about convent life as promoted by traditional hagiographic versions of history, but it also invites further historical inquiry into the private lives of women in the postwar era.

Third, as postwar Canada is an ever-expanding field of interest for scholars, the very consideration of the unique place of women religious in the story of postwar Canadian women is itself an important step in the documentation of the period. Further, the experiences of the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters illustrate that, like women in secular

society, women religious were seen - and eventually came to see themselves - via the lenses of psychology and medicine and to develop particular discourses about young women which reflected such understandings. Such discourses, while seemingly benign, shed much light on the psychological aspects of reform, particularly as sisters attempted to negotiate change in the areas of appearance and identity. The interplay between the images and realities of secular and religious women reveals that, as much as external changes affected sisters, so too did interior transformations regarding identity and self-understanding. Sisters' anxieties and their lived realities became increasingly connected to the experiences of secular women in Canada as the conciliar period drew to a close. In the movement from the 'we' to the 'I', and in the process reforming their dress, their work, and even their reading, religious began to see themselves, increasingly, as individuals and to understand themselves as women.

With regard to the question as to whether this thesis aids in the further re-remembering of women religious in the period by stimulating further interest and new questions, four considerations are warranted. First, the issues raised by the central methodological approach taken in this thesis - specifically, its employment of oral histories as its central source - are worthy of reflection. I concur with Marta Danylewycz, Elizabeth Smyth, Heidi MacDonald and other historians of Canadian sisters that the time is now (and, sadly, in some cases it has passed) to collect the oral histories of these fascinating, aged communities. Certainly, their timely collection and the rich content of the oral narratives themselves support the cogency of such an approach when conducting research with women religious. Additionally, the ways in which the sisters' narratives not only provided answers but also, in the end, helped to frame some larger research questions also validates the methodological choices in this work. For example, Chapter Two's section on the history of friendship in the pre-conciliar Ursuline and Holy Names communities evolved not from direct questions regarding interpersonal

relationships, but rather from a more general query regarding sisters' daily living in their early years with the community. Because comments about friendships and the restrictions against particular friendships arose consistently in the sisters' responses, a new historical question emerged regarding the place of these clandestine friendships in the larger process of reform. This is but one instance where the commitment to oral history as a central research method helped not only to create sources but also to shape the larger historical questions of the work. I feel that such interplay between oral narratives and historical questions not only validates oral history as a methodology, but also encourages historians to extend their thinking about the ways in which oral history might be employed.

Second, the intentionally interdisciplinary and eclectic theoretical approach adopted in this thesis is, I feel, continuous with twenty-first century women's historians' attempts to understand the relationships among disciplines whose approaches have sometimes been viewed as less than harmonious. What began with a strong commitment to feminist-materialist theory, and a mere hunch that the story of women's religious communities and conciliar reform might be best told through the lens of Women's History AND the window of Church history AND the eyes of Women's Studies, evolved into an intentionally interdisciplinary approach which took me further afield theoretically than I had initially thought feasible. At various times, this thesis 'reads' differently: Chapter One takes a fairly conventional (if left-leaning) Church History approach; Chapter Two, with its sometimes sparsely framed oral narratives, rings of Women's Studies scholarship, placing women and their lived realities at the centre of inquiry; Chapter Three orients the study in English-speaking post-war Canada, situating the history of women religious in the period within the larger History of Canadian Women as it has been recorded in both traditional and postmodern approaches; and in Chapter Four, a relatively new field, the History of Reading, comes into

play, intersecting with the Histories of Women and Church, in an attempt to probe these for their psychological and spiritual dimensions. To some readers, the merging of the disciplines and theoretical approaches represented herein may seem a bit convoluted or unnecessarily meandering. I am pulled, however, by Joan Scott's belief that "feminist history thrives on interdisciplinary encounters." According to Scott, who argues that a very close relationship exists between history and women's studies, "interdisciplinarity has been one of the ways we have learned to tell new stories;" further, the interdisciplinary field of women's studies has been the "proving grounds for the articulation of knowledge."² I feel that this thesis may contribute, albeit perhaps peripherally, to an argument that a meaningful and *reciprocal* relationship exists between Women's History and the more interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies. While it may be argued that Women's History has been the nurturing mother to Women's Studies, perhaps, as a now mature discipline, Women's Studies might contribute more fully to the familial relationship. This may be an important area for further exploration by scholars concerned with studies of interdisciplinarity, feminist pedagogy and the history of feminist theory.

Third, the conceptual framework for this thesis is an experiment in historical writing. Inspired by Paul Cohen's *History in Three Keys*, each chapter might be approached as a discrete entity, with each seeking to tell the story of reform from a distinct and increasingly narrowed perspective. Such a telescopic approach has its drawbacks as well as its merits. Beginning with a global story of institutional Church reform, narrowing to a communal accounting of change, tapering further into a more intimate probing of the relationship between discourse and psychological concerns, and, finally, daring to approach the small,

²Joan W. Scott, "Feminism's History," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 16, no. 3 (2004): 24.

hallowed spaces between readers and texts, this thesis seemingly becomes narrower instead of broader, and this may not appeal to every reader. At the same time, however, such an approach can take the historian, and the reader, into heretofore untraveled territory and might spawn further queries regarding changes in the psychology of religion or the experience of spirituality over time, both little-explored areas as they relate to the history of women and religion.

Finally, taking a step back from this thesis, a central goal of which was to get ‘inside’ the lives and experiences of women religious in the years surrounding Vatican II in order to more fully understand more elusive aspects of their histories, I am obliged to evaluate its success in this regard, and its place in the larger field of women’s history. After five years, two convents, 250 pages, and much consideration of the efficacy of exploring the intimate psychological and/or spiritual aspects of history, the answer is, I am not certain. Knowing that many scholars and writers from across the disciplines also experience doubts when attempting to assess the less quantifiable or temporal aspects of their studies, and seeking to, at the very least, contextualize my incertitude, I revisited Kristin Ohlson who, in *Stalking the Divine*, a personal memoir based on her experiences as a journalist investigating the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration, a community of contemplative nuns in Cleveland, Ohio, writes:

I had hoped to work my way through this book and emerge with an understanding of what their lives are like. The truth is that I really don’t know. Even if they had allowed me to come inside and watch them day and night, I still don’t think I would know.³

Although I have not been quite so reticent as Ohlson to draw conclusions about my research, to present it as a humble offering to the larger project of the history of women and religion in

³Kristin Ohlson, *Stalking the Divine* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 240.

Canada, I have to admit that I really do not truly understand the totality of the experience of religious life, five decades ago or in the present. Because their faith and their communal existence are realities so radically different from my own, I am without genuine empathy for their experience. In spite of the ways in which intersubjectivity, when acknowledged, can serve to shape and make sense of the relationship between investigator and oral history subjects, it would seem that, in matters of faith or spirituality, there are limitations to the ways in which ‘knowing’ or ‘understanding’ can facilitate empathy. I hesitate to say that only the faithful can research and write about faith; this would return the history of women and religion to its rather limiting institutional and hagiographic roots. Nonetheless, I do believe that there are limitations to the inquiry into the historical dimensions of faith. Perhaps, like faith itself, such inquiry is a life-long process.

Still, I feel there is much to be gained from an attempt at understanding personal and/or spiritual experiences. Epidemiologist David Snowdon reflects on how he and his colleagues, after reaching a key milestone in their Alzheimer’s research, began to consider the larger implications of their work with the Notre Dame Sisters:

As scientists addressing other professionals, we are limited to writing about what we can test. But as human beings, we look beyond our data to the unanswered questions and speculate how our discoveries impact our daily lives.⁴

Like Snowdon, I have considered the larger implications of this study, in this case for its conclusions regarding contemporary Roman Catholicism. As a product of a Catholic upbringing and education, I have, to some degree, a personal and collective stake in the future of the Church, and as the research with the Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters progressed, I could not help but consider how their experiences of conciliar reform could

⁴David Snowdon, *Aging With Grace* (New York: Bantam, 2001), 194.

shed light on the issues facing the Church in the twenty-first century. Margaret McMillan, paraphrasing American Cold War historian John Gaddis, reasons that

history is like using the rear-view mirror when you drive. If you only look back you will land in the ditch, but it helps to know where you have come from, and who else is on the road. And history can sometimes keep us from making mistakes.⁵

More instructively, as Wendy Mitchinson demonstrates, “if contemporary feminist concerns and theory can help illuminate the past, historical research can nuance the way in which we, as feminists, view the present.”⁶ What, then, can history, particularly women’s history, and specifically the history engaged in this thesis, offer to the Church of the twenty-first century?

Roman Catholicism is, by all standards, in crisis in Canada today. Church attendance is low, and Canadian seminaries are failing to attract young men. Throughout North America, on-going debates regarding the validity of an exclusively male priesthood and the Church’s refusal to entertain the possibility of married or female clergy, have alienated its membership, especially women. The vowed religious life for women has experienced rapid decline, due to lack of new recruits and the deaths of its aged members. Across the nation, the fallout from numerous scandals, including the widespread cases of abuse in Native residential schools, and pending charges against pedophile priests and the dioceses which enabled them, have further alienated an increasingly skeptical ‘faithful’. These issues alone demonstrate that the Roman Catholic Church is again, or still, in need of reform. Consideration of the salient characteristics of reform in women’s religious communities - its grassroots and ‘unofficial’ nature, its openness to experimentation, its willingness to grapple

⁵Margaret MacMillan, “Writing History,” in *Writing Life* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006), 240.

⁶Wendy Mitchinson, “The Impact of Feminism on the Research and Writing of Medical History: A Personal View,” *Atlantis*, Vol. 25-2 (Spring/Summer 2001), 92.

with issues of identity and gender - might illuminate solutions to what seems like an insurmountable crisis in Canadian Catholicism. The realities that further Church history can and ought to be done from a feminist perspective, and that there are questions to be asked and solutions to be proffered that can only be forged from a feminist engagement with the issues of the day, are not factors likely to be given serious consideration by the Church today. Because a 'pew's eye view' is, more than half the time, a woman's eye view, such reluctance seems short-sighted.

EPILOGUE

Canadian biographer Charlotte Gray describes the pivotal turning-point, or “‘Ah-ha!’ moment,” in a research project:

I always hope for a few ‘Ah-ha!’ moments - moments when the ribbon of time between past and present vibrates. . . . Until that moment, all the careful reading and systematic research that I’ve done feels more like an academic exercise, a careful accumulation of facts that would make a really boring book. . . . My ‘Ah-ha!’ moments are usually triggered by an artifact that gives me a tactile connection with my subject.¹

For me, the ‘Ah-ha!’ moment in this research project occurred on a Sunday afternoon in the fall of 2006 when I attended the final public celebration in the Mother House of the Chatham Ursulines. After a century in “The Pines”, the Mother House which had housed the order since 1870, the sisters were set to move into their newly built home, a smaller, custom-designed facility, much more suited to a smaller, aging community, and the event I attended was one of many final good-byes to the old convent. But this, the final public celebration in the Mother House chapel, was not a mass or a formal liturgy; rather, it was an interactive concert, featuring the Gaia Singers, a local eco-feminist choir comprised of women from Southwestern Ontario and Michigan, a few of them former sisters.

As the concert drew to a close I was among the first to leave the chapel, slipping out a few minutes early as I was late for another engagement. I passed through the chapel doors, descended the stairs, and hurried across the foyer of the convent, the heels of my boots clicking across the shiny terrazzo floor. . . and I thought about the young sister in the Prologue of this thesis scrubbing the foyer floor five decades earlier. I turned to look back on

¹Charlotte Gray, “Talking to the Dead,” in *Writing Life* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006), 181-182. Gray is the author of several significant biographies, including *Mrs. King: the life and times of Isabel Mackenzie King* (Toronto: Viking, 1997); *Sisters in the Wilderness: the lives of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill* (Toronto: Viking, 1999); and most recently, *Reluctant Genius: the inventions and passions of Alexander Graham Bell* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2006).

the chapel entrance, and saw the crowd of women emerging - most of them grey-haired, all smiling, some flanked by family and friends who had come to share in this momentous occasion. This was my 'Ah-ha' moment, the moment when 'the ribbon of time between past and present' vibrated. There we were - me, a student of history; the sisters, many twice my age; countless other women who had links to the Ursuline community; and the young sister scrubbing the floor. For just a moment, I could feel a connection among us.

So much has changed. This once vibrant community, it is obvious, is in decline. Women have so many 'alternatives' today, and the religious life is not prized among them. This community, like so many others in Canada, will die, and its members are acutely aware of its mortality. As one sister reflected,

I think we will die. But I think it's really important that, if we have twenty years, we don't sit there and wait to die, that we live fully the time that we have, to be of service and to live our commitments to women . . . We don't want to go out with sort of a whimper in the dark. . . What will come is not clear yet. Maybe this will be the end of an era for us, but I wonder if there might not be something that will come from our death that will be a new breakthrough in the service of the new Church.²

Besides the many schools, colleges, women's shelters and outreach programs which religious communities have founded, what will endure beyond the death of this and other religious communities is a legacy of a holistic model of reform which has sustained and enriched the lives of the women who participated in it four decades ago. It stands as a unique contribution to Church and women's history.

²Anne Denomy, O.S.U., interview by author, 26 October 2004, Stratford, Ontario, audiotape recording, Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

APPENDIX 1

General Information Regarding Oral History Collection

This oral history project was designed in accordance with and approved by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo.

The twenty-one oral histories collected for this project were recorded between November 2001 and April 2005 with women religious from the Ursuline Sisters of the Chatham Union and the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary Sisters of the Ontario Province. Two interviews were conducted with the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario. The sisters were between the ages of 54 and 86 at the time of the oral history collection. All participants were teachers at some time in their careers. Most were officially 'retired', though approximately 11 of them held either full- or part-time positions of leadership within their communities. Of those who worked full-time were an English-as-a-second-language instructor, a psychotherapist, an archivist, a registered massage therapist, and the director of a university women's centre. Most reported being involved in some form of volunteering.

All participants consented to tape-recording of their interviews, and no sister chose to use a pseudonym. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed by the author. All interviews were conducted in the Mother Houses of the respective communities, with the exception of three which were held in the sisters' private homes.

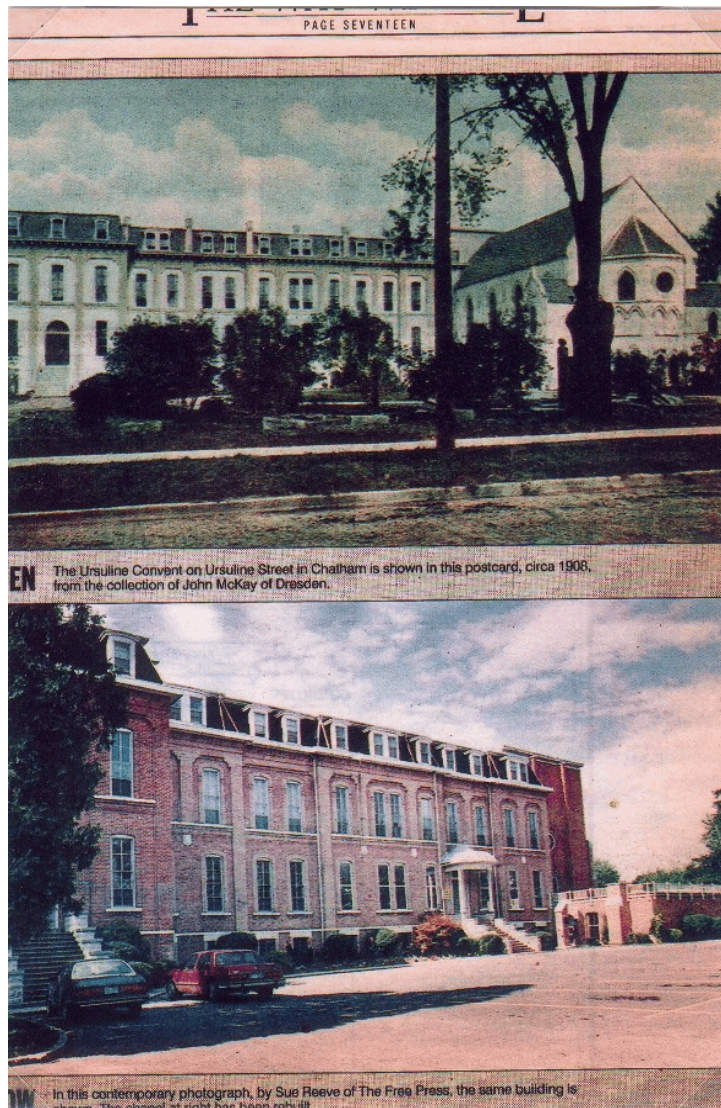
Questions for Oral History Participants

1. What is your name? What is your present occupation and/or position of leadership in your community?
2. Where were you born?
What were your parents' names and occupations?
3. Were you raised in the Catholic faith? Describe your religious upbringing.
4. What influenced you to enter religious life?
5. Why did you choose the [Ursuline/Holy Names] Sisters?
6. In what year did you enter religious life?
What was your age when you entered?
7. Describe your early years with the community - your occupation, place of residence, dress, size of community, positions of responsibility in the community.
8. In the years following the Second Vatican Council religious communities experienced significant reforms.
 - (i) Describe convent life preceding Vatican II. In what ways did your place of residence change as a result of reforms following Vatican II?
 - (ii) Describe your mode of dress preceding Vatican II. In what ways did your style of dress change following Vatican II?
 - (iii) Describe the leadership and decision-making models utilized by your community preceding Vatican II. Describe the changes in these areas following Vatican II.
 - (iv) Describe your perception of the population of your community preceding Vatican II - its size, average age, general educational level of members. Describe changes to the population of your community in the years following Vatican II.
9. In what ways did you participate in the decision-making process through which your community implemented reforms?
10. Are you aware of the ways in which your order disseminated information regarding organizational change to its members?
11. What was your initial reaction to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council - consider both broad ecclesial reforms, as well as the reforms which directly affected the day to day functioning of your particular community.
12. How did changes in dress affect your daily life?
13. Did you experience change to your living arrangement - i.e. living in a smaller house as opposed to a large convent? How did this affect your sense of belonging to the

larger community?

14. Did you experience a change in occupation or education during the period of and immediately following the Second Vatican Council. Explain.
15. Do you recall significant books or reading material that shaped your outlook on the Council and its reforms?
16.
 - (i) Overall, did you perceive the changes which occurred in religious life as positive or negative? Explain.
 - (ii) Did you sense that others in the community perceived change differently than you did? Explain.
17. You remained with your religious community through a period of dramatic change. Others left the community.
 - (i) What is *your* understanding of why others left the community?
 - (ii) Do you see connections between the changes which occurred in religious life in the 1960s and 1970s and the decline in membership which began in the same period. Explain.
18. When you reflect on changes in your community since the 1960s, what do you see as the most significant change? What has been the most positive change? What has been the most negative change?

APPENDIX 2



Ursuline Mother House, Grand Avenue Chatham, circa 1908 (top) and circa 1974 (below).
Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario



Brescia College, University of Western Ontario, circa 1950. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

APPENDIX 3



St. Mary's Academy, Windsor, Ontario, circa 1960. Holy Names Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

APPENDIX 4



Traditional Ursuline Habit, circa 1967. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.



Traditional Holy Names Habit, circa 1960. Holy Names Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

APPENDIX 5

Ursuline Sisters' Horarium:

Horarium and Spiritual Exercises

The order of the principal exercises of the day will be as follows:

The rising bell will be rung at 5:30

First meditation, 5:55 to 6:25

Angelus bell at 6

Second meditation at 6:25

Mass at 6:45 or thereabout

Breakfast immediately after Mass

Examen bell at 11:45

Angelus and dinner at 12 o'clock

Recreation after dinner until 1:20

Lecture in common at 1:20, except on Sundays and holidays

Sundays and holidays

Vespers at 1:35

Meditation at 1:55 for those who cannot attend at 5:30

Evening meditation at 5:30

Angelus and supper at 6 o'clock

Recreation after supper until 7:25

Bell for great silence at 7:25

Matins and Lauds at 7:35

Examen, night prayers, and points of meditation after the Office

Retire to cells at 9:30 or thereabout

Signal for extinguishing lights at 10 o'clock

Constitution of the Ursuline Religious of the Chatham Union, Chatham, Ontario, 1952, p. 16.
Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.

Holy Names Sisters' Horarium:

Order of the Day

5	o'clock	- rising
5:35	"	- Prayer. - Meditation.
6:25	"	- Holy Communion.
6:45	"	- Holy Mass. - Breakfast.
		Free time.
8:30	"	- Spiritual Reading.
10	"	- Visit to the B.Sacrament. and to the Blessed Virgin.
11:30	o'clock	- The Little Hours.
11:45	"	- Particular Examen.
12	"	- Dinner. - Recreation.
1:30	"	- Vespers and Complin.
5	"	- Matins and Lauds.
5:30	"	- Supper. - Recreation
7	"	- Obedience. - Study.
8:30	"	- Prayer. - Meditation.
9	"	- Repose.

N.B. Days on which Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is allowed, the Matins and Lauds are recited at 4:30 p.m.

Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Mother House, Outremont, 1939, p. 4-5. SNJM Ontario Archives, Windsor Ontario.

APPENDIX 6



Modified Ursuline Habit, circa 1967. Ursuline Archives, Chatham, Ontario.



Sister in lay clothing (left) and Sister in modified Holy Names Habit (right), circa 1975.
Holy Names Ontario Archives, Windsor, Ontario

GLOSSARY

B.V.M.	Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary
C.D.P.	Sisters of Divine Providence
C.S.J.	Sisters of St. Joseph
O.S.U.	Ursuline Sisters
G.N.S.H.	Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart
R.S.M.	Sisters of Mercy
S.N.J.M	Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary
S.S.N.D.	School Sisters of Notre Dame

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