

## Consensus

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Volume 24

Issue 2 *Essays on Liturgy and Worship*

Article 20

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11-1-1998

# The tiny red bathing suit of Mr. July

Thomas St. James O'Connor

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### Recommended Citation

O'Connor, Thomas St. James (1998) "The tiny red bathing suit of Mr. July," *Consensus*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 , Article 20.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol24/iss2/20>

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in so doing she imports religious experience and meaning *onto* daily tasks, rather than mining them for sacred or religious meaning embodied in the act itself. Cleaning her basement, sorting and dusting bits and pieces of her past, leads her to sing a hymn; defiantly hanging out her laundry on a bitter cold winter day breaks her claustrophobic mood; going for a walk at dawn grants her the time and space to turn her thoughts to the newness of each day. The daily tasks of life afford her the opportunity to break free from depression and acedia and transport her to a place of trust, hope and contentment in God. The tasks create a “cloister” for herself in the midst of drudgery or chaos, but the *doing* of the tasks themselves is mundane and not intrinsically religious. Norris, therefore, touches on but skirts the very incarnational embodiment of daily life she seeks to uplift.

Despite this fact, this book is an important contribution to the field of spirituality and encourages readers to examine the artificial boundaries between daily/sacred, religious/secular, holy/mundane. As such it provides excellent material for personal reading and small group reflection on the religious and spiritual significance experienced in the everyday acts of our lives.

Barbara Frey  
Cambridge, Ontario

### **The Tiny Red Bathing Suit of Mr. July**

Jean Clayton

Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1997

127 pages, \$12.95 Softcover

This is an inspiring resource book for those interested in offering pastoral care to the chronically ill who are institutionalized. Jean Clayton draws on her nine years of chaplaincy in a long term care facility and shares a variety of vignettes around various themes outlining her personal and professional learnings. She has offered ministry to those in need and has learned ministry from those in need. She addresses issues such as sexuality, dementia, ethics, worship services, communication challenges, multicultural realities, death and funerals. The title refers to a poster that a resident had on her hospital room wall that helped the residents and some staff address some of their sexual needs.

The strengths of the book are many. The issues that she addresses are important ones and she offers some insightful practical interventions around these issues. The book is easy to read, inspirational, and focuses on

concrete situations. As a chaplain in a chronic care hospital, I found her suggestions for worship helpful. She also offers appropriate advice to community clergy who make pastoral visits and lead worship in the institution. For example, she notes that community clergy who were invited to lead worship and acted only in a cheerleading role (“Is everyone happy?”) were not asked again by the residents. Residents preferred a gentler approach that did not avoid the pain of their situations. Clayton also demonstrates in her stories a sense of humour and respect and care for the residents that ought to be imitated.

The weaknesses of the book include a failure to connect her ideas and practices to a wider theoretical base. There is no definition of pastoral care nor a description of her theological method. As I read the book, I wondered what theological method shaped her practice. Also on page 10, she claims that there is not a lot in the non-scientific literature about working with the old and chronically ill. This claim is not true. The literature is vast and growing and Clayton fails to connect with it. Researchers like Harold Koenig, David Larson, Pamela Reed, Elizabeth Taylor and others have made significant contributions in this area. On the whole, I recommend this book for pastors and lay persons seeking practical help about pastoral visitation and leading worship with the chronically ill in an institution.

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### **Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice**

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998

202 pages

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, each known for formative and transformative writings and publications in religious education, have been and continue to be significant and influential shapers of religious education not only in North America but world wide. Their scholarship, educational expertise, leadership and personal involvement in a variety of educational and ecclesiastical contexts have been important in helping religious education — which is defined as “that part of education concerned with religious attitudes, ideas and practices” (8) — come into its own. Maria Harris is a national consultant in religious education. Gabriel Moran, her husband, is Director of the Program of Religious Education at New York University.