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Final vows: Organizational dilemmas and emergent status-reconstruction of the contemporary American nun

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**Final vows: Organizational dilemmas and emergent
status-reconstruction of the contemporary American nun**

Wichroski, Mary Anne, Ph.D.

University of New Hampshire, 1994

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FINAL VOWS: ORGANIZATIONAL DILEMMAS AND EMERGENT
STATUS-RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NUN

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

May, 1994

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Mary Anne Wichroski

This dissertation has been examined and approved.



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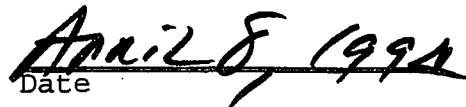
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DEDICATION

For JOHN, and for our children, MERILEE, ALISON, and
MICHAEL, who together represent our greatest achievement.

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I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, each of whom had a contribution to make to this project: Professor Stephen Reyna for his ideas on constructivist theory and his knowledge of ethnography; Professor William Jones for his suggestions on the historical component of the dissertation; Professor Melvin Bobick for his expertise in social theory and his enthusiasm for this project; Professor Frederick Samuels for his suggestions regarding social psychological aspects of the research questions; and finally, my advisor and dissertation director, Professor Bud B. Khleif, for his thoroughness in reading the manuscript, his careful editing, suggestions for readings, intuitive and challenging criticisms always tinged with encouragement -- and his on-going support throughout the fieldwork, as well as the doctoral program itself.

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Solemnites (a pseudonym) for her openness, for supplying me with documents and extending herself within the very real constraints of her way of life, and for the support and prayers of her community. I would also like to thank the Director of Archives of the Sisters of Compassion (also a pseudonym) who gave me immeasurable assistance, provided me with documents, and showed much patience with my constant questions and sometimes relentless search for information over the course of many months. In addition, I would like to thank all of the sisters who have shared with me their time, memories, experience, and advice throughout this fieldwork.

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PREFACE

The story of Roman Catholic nuns is an often overlooked chapter in the history of the Catholic Church, as well as a fascinating account of the experience of a unique group of women in American history. I preface this dissertation with a brief account of my first impressions of two very different religious communities because they capture the essence of what was to become the twofold theme of this dissertation: continuity and change.

The idea for a comparative study of female religious orders was barely taking shape on my first visit to the Motherhouse of one of the orders I was to become most interested in. On arrival there on a beautiful Spring day, I was met at the door by an elderly nun whose greetings were muted for me by the strains of an old Irish ballad called "On Galway Bay." As we stepped through the interior doors, I saw a nun in full habit being wheeled down the hall in her casket. I was to learn later that the ballad was being sung at her request and that funerals had become a way of life, an ordinary event in this once thriving community.

This was to be a day of sadness for a way of life becoming obsolete. A mixture of impressions assailed me: the beautiful grounds still well kept, the lovely school

now used by an affiliated college, the medieval-style castle, once a training school for novices, now in need of repair and used in fundraising efforts, and the funeral of one of their sisters. There was a sense of warmth and happiness in this place but an air of sadness as well, a tragic optimism which was to stay with me over the course of this fieldwork -- a fatalism mixed with joy and purpose.

The contrast between this experience and my first visit to the monastery of a different order was profound. Equally beautiful grounds on an early summer day added to my sense of anticipation as I followed the walkway up to the entrance. The brightness of the day was cut off abruptly by the cool interior of a dark foyer with heavy wooden doors locked on all sides. A voice greeted me from behind the front wall and soon I heard the clicking sound of the door to my left being unlocked. I sat in the small parlor facing a wooden grate and awaited the arrival of the Mother Superior, a woman I would meet several times in the future and someone I would come to know and respect. Here it was as though time stood still -- the silence and sacredness of this way of life were upheld and on later visits the presence of young faces would attest to the continuation of a long tradition.

This dissertation is my attempt to explain this contrast. It is written for a sociological audience but it is a story as well -- a narrative about long-term

historical, structural transformation and the consciousness of members of changing organizations. Here the sacred and profane meet -- the modern and pre-modern, the secular and spiritual, the individual and the community, the sociological and the psychological, tradition and science -- providing a microcosm of something larger; that is, the effects of profound social change on people and places in our times.

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ABSTRACT

FINAL VOWS: ORGANIZATIONAL DILEMMAS AND EMERGENT
STATUS-RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NUN

by

Mary Anne Wichroski
University of New Hampshire, May, 1994

This dissertation examines the effects of societal, institutional, and structural change on the status of Roman Catholic nuns. Based on interviews with 34 members of female religious orders, archival materials, Church documents, and participant observation, two case study orders (apostolic and cloistered) are compared in terms of structural change since Vatican II and their relative viability in the 1990s. As members of declining organizations, apostolic sisters are reconstructing their roles by drawing upon sources that pre-date formal hierarchical structures, as well as aspects of gender-status. Although active sisters show some congruence with feminist beliefs on work-related issues, other aspects of the feminist agenda are less relevant to them. While both orders exhibit the nurturant and emotive aspects of womanhood in their work, cloistered nuns, living in a sexually-segregated community, draw upon symbols of female physicality to enhance their spirituality. Both groups show congruence with women in other institutionalized roles in terms of gender-affirmation and negotiation of status.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE AND FORMAT OF THE STUDY

Roman Catholic religious orders of women represent one of the oldest forms of female community. While the feminist movement has emphasized the notion of women supporting other women, prompting the social scientific study of many women's groups, including nuns, the story of Roman Catholic sisters is still unfolding. In addition to their long history within the Church, sisters have played a significant role in American society, founding hospitals and schools and serving the needs of the immigrant population. After a period of upheaval brought on by the mandates of Vatican II in the mid-1960s and other societal changes, there are women who remain in these communities. Much has been written within the Church since Vatican II with regard to the declining numbers and changing role of females in Catholic religious orders but this topic has been less often addressed by mainstream sociologists. While some of these have indeed addressed the repercussions of Vatican II on female religious orders, more research is called for with reference to the post-exodus stage, including the more traditional cloistered orders which were less affected by this transition. For sociologists, Catholic sisters provide an opportunity to explore the

unique experience of this religious group as part of the overall experience of American women in the 20th century. In this dissertation, I focus on contemporary American nuns, women whose way of life has been challenged by cultural, institutional, and organizational change and on the way they are handling that challenge in the present. My informants come from one state in the Eastern region of the United States.

Religious Orders of Women

Religious orders of men and women exist under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church, supervised by the Congregation for Religious Institutes of Consecrated Life in Rome, which approves the rules and constitutions of individual orders (Ebaugh, 1993:5). Under the guidelines approved by the Vatican, religious orders are financially self-supporting and self-governing. Unlike Roman Catholic clergy who are members of the official hierarchy, most male and female religious orders, although they may serve individual dioceses, have Pontifical status; that is, they have their own internal hierarchies and report directly to Rome. An important distinction needs to be made between two types of female religious orders. Technically, those living a monastic or cloistered life are referred to as "nuns," while those taking simple vows, traditionally living a semi-cloistered life while working in the world as teachers, nurses, or social workers, are referred to as "sisters." To the general public, and even to Church

officials today, the words are synonymous and used interchangeably. Active sisters (sometimes referred to as "apostolic orders") far outnumber contemplative nuns. Of the 94,022 nuns in the United States today, approximately 4,000 are members of contemplative orders, that is, between 4 and 5 per cent of the total (Official Catholic Directory, 1993). Similarly, in the Eastern state under study, contemplative nuns account for 5 per cent of the total membership of female orders.

While the position of religious orders as an arm of the Church has remained unchanged, a series of historical events, culminating in the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s, resulted in major structural change within the Roman Catholic Church, including the internal reorganization of existing religious communities. Role expectations and obligations of Catholic nuns and priests, which had been uniform for several centuries, were suddenly re-examined and dramatically re-shaped. Societal and cultural change, including trends towards democracy and self-expression, as well as recognition of contemporary social problems impinging on both clergy and laity, brought the Church into a phase of accommodation resulting in a spirit of ecumenism and openness: both clergy and religious orders would now be required to become more active participants in the secular world. The Church undertook a re-assessment of lifestyles, needs, and work in order to allow religious (the word "religious" is used here and

throughout as a noun and refers to those in religious orders; it denotes both singular and plural) to better live their mission in modern times, in accordance with the norms of the wider culture. A more modernized Church created a series of organizational dilemmas and unintended consequences in that the old authority structures were unpredictably altered. Group decision-making replaced the former totalitarian system and higher education was mandated for female religious. In general, the emphasis shifted from self-denial and pious-prayer life to more involvement in the outside world, with a new recognition of self-fulfillment, of individual needs. Ironically, these new freedoms contributed to personal dissatisfaction on the part of many nuns and priests -- that is, the social system that protected them, the one they had been socialized into, had collapsed -- leading to large numbers of defections and to critical shortages of active religious in the 1990s. (While the number of active diocesan priests is expected to have declined by 40 percent between 1966 and the year 2005, (Eifert, 1990:11), Catholic religious orders of women have lost about 44 percent of their membership between 1960 and 1993, based on the numbers reported in the Official Catholic Directories for those years.)

Personnel losses have led to changes in the division of labor within the Catholic Church which have profoundly affected female religious. While the decline in the number of American priests has been paralleled by the decline in

the numbers of female religious, the latter have always far outnumbered the former. Statistics on the membership of religious orders indicate that for every male religious in the world, there are four female religious (Ebaugh, 1993:5). In 1993, the Official Catholic Directory reported that there were 51,052 priests in the United States and 94,022 sisters, while in the state under study here there were 365 priests and 927 sisters, a ratio of almost 3 to 1 (Official Catholic Directory, 1993). Shortages in the priesthood have necessitated further adaptation by the Church in terms of allocation of resources and work tasks and new freedoms for erstwhile subordinates; for example, many sisters and lay people have been allowed to take over some of the responsibilities formerly handled by priests.

Consistent with Church mandates in the past, changes have affected women's communities in different ways than they have affected male orders; for example, cloistral regulations have been far more stringent for women and historically they have been restricted from certain types of ministry, such as preaching. In the present, sisters have been required to adapt to organizational change by eliminating outdated customs, engaging in new types of work, to be re-educated in different occupational fields -- in essence, to take on more responsibilities with less of their former autonomy. New controversies have arisen over the role of women religious in the 1990s, including the question of female pastors (cf., for example, Wallace,

1993). With the lifting or elimination of cloistral regulations for many communities, the sisters have been thrown back on their own judgment and initiative to formulate structures of their own that remain consistent with the missions of their individual communities but are also accepted by the overarching structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

The current lives of female religious reflect a series of transformations, both personal and professional. It is within the context of institutional change that this study seeks to identify the ways in which contemporary religious communities have adapted to social, cultural, and institutional forces. This dissertation addresses issues of organizational change on three levels: first, in the context of religious orders as "systems" which have experienced varied levels of organizational decline; secondly, in the context of role adaptation and psychological adjustment required of the remaining members of these communities; and thirdly, in the context of the changing role of American women in the 1990s. A review of the more general literature is followed by a discussion of the topics specific to this study, incorporating relevant research.

Review of the Literature

Since Vatican II, much has been written on the radical changes that affected religious orders. Kolmer (1984) provides a chronological review of the literature on this

subject from 1950 to 1983. The main body of work on this was written by church people for church people, the earlier writings by male religious and later ones by women, often those living in these communities. Interpretations of the documents of Vatican II were often the theme of these writings. The Nun in the World (Suenens, 1963) heralded a group of publications on different aspects of renewal after Vatican II, such as Muckenhirn's *The Changing Sister* (1965) and *The New Nuns* (1967), collections of the experiences and ideas of religious women. The Review for Religious provided much of the early periodical literature on this topic, with articles on the psychological aspects of renewal, the formation of new sisters, and issues regarding the new guidelines as they were affecting religious orders. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious also generated, and continues to produce, many publications dealing with the role of women within the Church. Writings by the sisters themselves have increased in the past decade (Donovan, 1989; Ferraro and Hussey, 1990; Quinonez and Turner, 1992; Schneiders, 1986; Violet, 1988; Ware, 1985; Weaver, 1986).

Interest in this topic also generated several dissertations in the 70s and 80s (see Kolmer, 1984 for a complete listing) and some studies of religious communities (Bernstein, 1979; Campbell-Jones, 1978; Ebaugh, 1977, 1988, 1993; Ewens, 1978; Griffin, 1975; San-Giovanni, 1978). Nuns are also being cited in connection with feminist

consciousness (Curb and Manahan, 1985; Wittberg, 1989) and within the gerontological literature (Magee, 1987; Wolf, 1990a, 199b). In addition, there are some historical works dealing with nuns (Brown, 1986; Daichman, 1986; Danylewycz, 1987; Elkins, 1988; Gold, 1985, 1993). Finally, it appears that the literature on nuns has expanded from that of internal interest to a focus of the social sciences in general (cf., for example, Ebaugh, 1984, 1993; Neal, 1984, 1990), yet most of the current literature focuses upon active orders rather than on contemplative nuns. The following sections draw upon some of this literature to discuss areas to be explored in this dissertation.

Organizational Decline

Changes affecting religious orders today have been characterized as a case of organizational decline (Ebaugh, 1993). Recent research on organizations discusses the causes and effects of organizational death. A discussion of theoretical approaches to organizational decline in Chapter II points to the inapplicability of some of these models to normative organizations. On the other hand, Ebaugh (1993) summarizes the exogenous and structural factors leading to the decline of religious orders of women, presenting a process model which calls for further empirical comparisons, particularly if one adds to this the experience of a contemplative order. Her findings suggest that many of the predicted outcomes associated with decline did not come to pass for religious orders. Additional

research on the decline of normative organizations may lead to a broader based model that might be applied to these types of social systems. However, organizational dilemmas have created structural changes that, while unique to religious orders, could be compared across communities. For example, career and community changes have led to the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity within some communities (Briody and Sullivan, 1988) and different philosophies have affected relative change between orders since Vatican II (Campbell-Jones, 1978). A comparative approach, using two case study orders, might help to illustrate why two different orders or "systems" have experienced different rates of decline. Once organizational change is examined in this way, the next step is to look at how this change has affected the members of these communities by setting in motion a process termed here as "emergent status-reconstruction."

Emergent Status-Reconstruction

What of the consciousness of members of a declining organization? Studies of active religious orders have found little evidence of decrease in morale for these women (Ebaugh, 1993:36-39 and Wolf, 1990). Yet others have written of the severe identity crisis of American nuns as a group (Neal, 1990; Quinonez and Turner, 1992). Magee (1987) and Wolf (1990a, 1990b) have discussed nuns in the literature on aging. Financial worries, as well as issues of aging and retirement, may be exacerbated for nuns

by the problems of coping with a declining status.

The current position of the contemporary American nun may be characterized as a form of status passage. Status passage is a reflection of social and organizational change; new roles are created, some are eliminated, and some are altered. Glaser and Strauss (1971) developed a formal theory of status passage, including the concept of "emergent" roles, meaning these are created and shaped by the incumbents as they go along because there are no prior guidelines nor social supports for this process (Glaser and Strauss, 1971:85-86). This theory has been applied to the ex-nun which is a relatively new status passage (Ebaugh, 1984; San Giovanni, 1978). For those who leave religious life, there are problems of self-transformation and psychological disengagement (Ebaugh, 1977, 1984; Neal, 1984; San Giovanni, 1978). Autobiographies of former nuns, most of which are written by former active sisters trained prior to Vatican II, provide insights into convent life and attest to the difficulties of leaving an old status to enter a new one (for example, Armstrong, 1982; Baldwin, 1950; Griffin, 1975; Henderson, 1972; Turk, 1971; Upton, 1985; Wong, 1983). Less research has been done on the issue of role adjustment for women who do remain within the institution. One exception is Ebaugh's (1993) most recent work on organizational decline, which includes a case study of an active religious order and addresses many of the issues facing women in dying communities.

San Giovanni (1978) extended the emergent status passage concept to include persons who either create new roles or "modify the institutionalized pathways of existing ones" (San Giovanni, 1978:5). This is perhaps a more fitting model for nuns who have chosen to remain in the convent. In the absence of traditional structures, they must construct new means of support not made available by the institution, planning and shaping their identities as they go along. It is this process of what might be termed "emergent status-reconstruction" that this study attempts to examine; that is, changes in the boundary structures supporting the role of nun have set in motion a process of role readjustment that requires linkage of the old support structures with new ones. In other words, old and new role expectations and obligations must be incorporated into everyday life in the present. The extent to which this is successfully managed -- that is, the extent to which, in the absence of formal structures, nuns succeed in "carrying their communities with them," so to speak, retaining some aspects of the identity shaped by their particular socialization process within their specific religious communities and incorporating this into a workable view of themselves in the present -- will determine the degree of satisfaction they achieve in their present roles. Part of this process involves the renewed commitment of sisters to their own womanhood; that is, gender emerges as an important variable in understanding the dynamics of women

in institutionalized roles, including American nuns. This leads to a discussion of the connection of American nuns to other women's groups.

Points of Congruence

Contemporary sisters have also been cited in connection with feminist consciousness (Curb and Manahan, 1985; Raymond, 1972; Weaver, 1986; Wittberg, 1989). Recent research in Women's Studies has focused on groups of women outside of, or even opposed to, mainstream feminism, indicating gender-affirming beliefs and practices of women living under patriarchal systems (Abu-Lughod, 1985; Altorki, 1988; Caplan, 1985; El-Solh, 1988; Gilkas, 1985; Kaufman, 1991; Luker, 1984; Morsy, 1988; Rose, 1987, Rowland, 1985; Usher and Fels, 1985). Of special interest are those women who have voluntarily rejected mainstream cultural values for an alternative lifestyle within orthodox religious traditions (Caplan, 1985; Davidman and Greil, 1993; Kaufman, 1991). Yet only very recently have sociologists begun to include the contemporary American nun (cf, Ebaugh, 1993; Wittberg, 1989); furthermore, focusing on the most outspoken and profeminist nuns leaves out the experience of a significant number of women (Wittberg, 1989:536).

Finally, although there are descriptive accounts of monastic communities, and some anthropological studies (for example, Williams, 1981) and historical works (for example, Strahan, 1988; Gold, 1993), few sociologists have explored

the contemporary world of female contemplative religious orders. The apparent gap in sociological knowledge may be due to lack of access to the world of cloistered religious groups.

Despite very real differences between contemplative and active orders, many women from both groups have opted to remain in their communities under conditions of institutional upheaval, are subject to some of the same patriarchal institutional constraints, and should be included in comparisons of women's experience. In summary, some previous research has indicated that the contemporary American nun is undergoing a process of role adjustment that is emergent and ongoing. Sisters are also coping with the decline of their communities as they themselves undergo the aging process. The work of active sisters has shifted from teaching into other types of ministry, primarily social service and health care, requiring new forms of education, loss of professional autonomy, and increased exposure to the outside world. Financial worries are paramount. Their formal status within the Church has become ambiguous and their future uncertain. Change has affected the cloister as well, as the mandates of Vatican II had to be reconciled with the customs and lifestyles of contemplative orders. Both types of orders have suffered losses, yet many women have remained, in both apostolic and contemplative communities, to live out their original commitments despite these

obstacles. Where they are now, thirty years after the Second Vatican Council, is the focus of this study.

Goals

This purpose of this dissertation is to add to the literature on contemporary American nuns by exploring the attitudes, values, experiences, and concerns of women who have voluntarily entered and remain within the patriarchal world of institutionalized Catholicism. Building on the aforementioned themes of status reconstruction viewed as a result of organizational change and/or decline, as well as the link between the experience of Roman Catholic nuns and other women's groups, the analysis attempted here proceeds on three levels: social psychological, organizational, and societal.

On the social psychological level this study seeks to identify those life and work strategies employed by contemporary sisters to reconstruct their status as religious women of the 1990s. Which symbols have been rejected and which retained, for example? What new symbolic systems have been created to legitimate their current work and lifestyles?

On the organizational level, how have structural differences led to varied rates of decline for religious communities? The contrast between an active community and a contemplative order allows us to examine structural differences and the way these are interconnected with the larger environment (the culture at large), the larger

institution (the Catholic Church), and the members themselves, resulting in different degrees of change and consequently different experiences for individuals.

On the societal level, rapid social change has created problems of identity and role confusion for American women in general (including nuns) as we approach the 21st century. The modern American nun provides a microcosm of the sociological and psychological processes set in motion by larger cultural and institutional forces. They provide a basis for comparison with other non-mainstream women as well as with American women in general. The final goal of this research is to compare the contemporary American nun with other groups of women studied who appear to have developed what has been termed a "postfeminist consciousness" (Rosenfelt and Stacey, 1987) in order to cope with the problems of postindustrial society. Some questions to be addressed that incorporate all levels of analysis include the following:

1. In what ways can the convent or "sisterhood" still be characterized as a "social system" within the larger institution of the Church?
2. What mechanisms of boundary maintenance are employed in order to uphold the status of nun?
3. What means of legitimation are used to validate the role of the nun in contemporary American society?
4. What strategies are employed to negotiate their roles within an institution that continues to be shaped by a dominant male hierarchy?
5. What contradictions are there between the formal ideology and the actual beliefs and practices of Catholic sisters?

6. What congruence or incongruence is there between the beliefs and practices of women within religious orders and other groups of women inside and outside of mainstream feminism?
7. Finally, what can the 20th century American nun's experience tell us about the experience of women in contemporary society? To what extent can the study of adaptation of contemporary nuns be considered a useful environment for examining the adaptation of a considerable number of women today?

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the social psychology of role change and status passage, particularly as it applies to women in changing institutionalized roles. In addition, rather than categorizing women as conservative or liberal, pro or anti-issues, this dissertation is an attempt to identify and inter-link whatever life and work strategies are used by contemporary women regardless of institutional affiliation, formal ideology, or religious belief.

Format

The following chapter deals with theoretical issues, emphasizing the literature on organizational decline and a framework for analysis of the convent community as a social system, as well as emergent status-reconstruction as an extension of the theory of status passage. Chapter III deals with methodology, including some observations and issues that arose from a qualitative approach. Chapter IV gives a brief history of religious orders of women, while Chapters V and VI deal with the historical backgrounds, organizational structure, lifestyles, and demographics of the apostolic and contemplative case study orders. Chapter

VII offers a comparative analysis of the convent community as a social system, using information gathered on these two communities to explain structural changes since the Second Vatican Council. In Chapter VIII, I discuss the repercussions of institutional change on the members of active communities and identify some of the strategies used to deal with the changing status of nuns and contemporary convent life. In Chapter IX, gender consciousness is addressed, as well as a comparison of the experience of contemporary sisters with other women's groups, identifying patterns and points of congruence between them. In Chapter X, the final chapter, I summarize the major conclusions drawn from this study and discuss the future of American nuns, offering some suggestions for further research. I have also provided a list of the relevant documents of Vatican II which are cited within the dissertation (Appendix A) and a glossary of religious terms (Appendix C) which might be helpful to the reader.

We turn now to a discussion of the theoretical foundations from which the research questions presented here have been developed.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this chapter, I present the theoretical basis for the issues being addressed in this study. After a discussion of the relationship between religion and society, with particular emphasis on Catholicism, the theme of organizational decline is used as a means of explaining the structural changes that have occurred in religious orders of women. Finally, the more micro-level phenomenon of emergent status-reconstruction is introduced in order to explain the social psychological aspects of a particular type of status passage, and the accompanying role adjustment, that is affecting women in these communities.

Sociological questions regarding religious orders of women encompass different levels of analysis. Macro theory, including that of social movements, may help to explain the overall process of social change, manifested by institutional change. On the organizational level, that is, the intermediate level between macro and micro phenomena, religious orders have experienced extensive structural changes, such as the dismantling of the cloister for active orders, the institution of more democratic decision making within convents, and the subsequent loss of members, which may have signalled their inevitable demise

in the near future. Here our concern is: why and how do social systems become obsolete?

Social psychological questions arise as to the meaning of traditional roles for individuals caught up in a declining organization and how changing role relationships affect the on-going needs of people. Role conflict in ambiguous situations, as well as the reconciliation of formal and informal aspects of roles, become important. How do persons in changing institutionalized roles adapt to their new status? Here, questions about the consciousness of members of dying communities, a phenomenon characteristic of post-industrial society, are quite relevant.

We begin then with a macro-sociological view of the relationship between religion (in this case, Catholicism) and society over the last century, which provides a theoretical framework whereby to examine both the structural and social psychological causes and consequences of organizational change as it has affected Roman Catholic nuns.

Religion and Society

Toynbee's (1946) notion, that all civilizations rise and fall according to their ability to meet the challenges of the physical and social environment, applies to the Catholic Church, whose long history as a global institution has reflected a combination of resistance and accommodation to outside interference. In modern times sociologists have

emphasized the changes in attitude brought on by industrialization, secularization, and scientific positivism. Weber's notions regarding the relentless pursuit of rationalism ("Rationalisierung") that characterizes modern society, especially as linked to his notion of a de-mystification of the world ("Entzauberung der Welt"), might serve as a reference point: the Catholic Church could be considered the last bastion of resistance to this trend in modern society. Although the Church is the largest bureaucracy in the Western world, its ideology and precepts harken back to an earlier pre-industrial era that embraced traditional, patriarchal, and authoritative patterns.

Berger (1969) has emphasized the dialectical relationship between religion and society. As an element of culture, religion might be considered an independent variable, while recent history has shown that it can be viewed as a dependent variable under the impact of secularization (Berger, 1969:128). Organized religion -- that is, the social form of the idea, the institution itself -- on the other hand, has the ability to "act back" on itself in certain situations (Berger, 1969:128); for example, in the response of the Catholic Church, as well as its organizations, to secular threats. One can find evidence historically of both resistance and accommodation. Some papal decrees often took the form of defensive statements in reaction to internal or external problems,

while some reflected the relative acceptance or accommodation to new ideas.

Berger asserts that different strata of modern society are affected by secularization in terms of their closeness or distance from the economic sector and identifies what he calls a "cultural lag" between secularization of the economy and that of the state and family (Berger, 1969:129-30). Today the rational foundations of modern society, with its emphasis on the scientific and technical, has moved into all spheres of life, including the sacred. In Western societies, the ethos of capitalism has encroached further into once more traditional realms, such as the family and religion. While at one time Christendom and the state represented the same world -- two factions rather than two competing institutions -- the spread of rationalism has permeated both, and as Berger puts it, they "begin to resemble each other sociologically" (Berger, 1969:139).

Despite the fact that religion and the state were effectively segregated into two spheres, religion used to fulfill the task of constructing a common world, an ultimate meaning binding upon all. This meaning has been shattered today because it no longer supports our way of life. Furthermore, religious privatization and pluralism (that is, religion becoming a strictly personal matter and the increasing tolerance towards those of other faiths) has resulted in various plausibility structures (that is, a

multitude of meaning systems) without an "objective reality in consciousness to be taken for granted" (Berger, 1969:151). In a similar vein, Habermas sees three dominant trends in modern society: (1) the decline of the "public sphere" (that is, the opportunity for free and open discussion of public concerns); (2) increasing intervention of the state into the economy; and (3) the dominance of science in service of state and technical control (Turner, 1991:263-64). He identifies the three basic subsystems of life as the economic, the politico-administrative, and the cultural or lifeworld. Each of these spheres contains specific crises that have to be met. The economic realm is responsible for productivity and meeting the basic needs of society, the politico-administrative for making the rational decisions that carry this out, and the lifeworld, the locus of such cultural crises as those of motivation and legitimation. The motivation crisis occurs when one cannot use cultural symbols to generate sufficient meaning in order to feel committed to participate fully in society (a case of what Durkheim has termed "anomie" or normlessness). Legitimation crisis means that actors do not possess the needed motivations nor commitments to the political subsystem's right to make decisions (Turner, 1991:264-265).

It is these latter two crises associated with the lifeworld that Habermas sees as characteristic of late capitalism. In the past, religious ideologies provided

much of the symbolic support system that upheld the other spheres of life; in Habermas' term, they constituted a large part of the "lifeworld." Similarly, Berger (1969) speaks of the plausibility gap and legitimation deficit with regard to religious systems of meaning. Polarization in modern society has led to "fragmented universes of meaning" (Berger, 1969:134) and those who adhere to old meanings become "cognitive minorities" (Berger, 1969:153), faced -- much like the Catholic Church -- with the same challenge of resistance or accommodation. Whatever course is chosen requires legitimation in order for meaning and motivation to be reinforced in the first case or redefined in the second. An example serves to clarify this.

More than a century ago, Vatican I reasserted Papal primacy and rejection of secularization, providing formal resistance to modern culture. It was not until the mid-1960s that the forces of change became apparent and Pope John XXIII's call to "open the windows" of the Church resulted in vast reforms. The move towards ecumenism and a more rational point of view are evident in many of the documents of Vatican II. More recent is the following rather dramatic case, namely, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI issued on February 2, 1974, regarding devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary, an area that had been mystical in character, that is, pre-rationalistic in Weber's terms, and a point of contention between Catholics and Protestants, particularly when it comes to the reported

visions of the Virgin over time, many of which were officially recognized by the Church.

Marian devotions must be ecumenical in character. Every care must be taken to avoid any exaggeration which would mislead other Christian brethren about the true teaching of the Church. They must inculcate a better understanding of Mary's place in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church on the part of our separated brethren, thus smoothing the path to Christian unity. Marian devotions must be in harmony with modern anthropological studies by paying close attention to the findings of the human sciences. They must take account of the profound changes that have occurred in the psycho-sociological field in which the modern person lives and works" (cited in Schraner, 1981:74).

The above is an example of a reversal in thinking which has meant an undermining of symbols long taken for granted and has resulted in a credibility gap due to the implementation of new symbols without psychological legitimation for them.

This crisis in legitimation can be discussed on both organizational and individual levels, since it has filtered down to members of religious organizations themselves. Rather than presuming some "intellectual fall from grace," (Berger, 1969:129), we can better understand the collapse of plausibility by looking at social structure and then to consciousness, again remembering that this is a dialectical process. The same idea of cultural lag is appropriate here in that while the Church mandated change for its internal organizations, the renewal process undergone for religious orders was a long and painful process. The logic of a new system, coupled with some incipient changes, preceded appropriate structures, as well as viable ideologies to support it.

Although organizational problems are exemplified by the people within them, this does not mean we can change problems by changing people because people have been shaped by the organization (Perrow, 1970:4). Furthermore, organizations exist in various niches in society and ill-adapted ones often die. What has happened to religious orders of women in this century demands a structural approach with an emphasis upon the relationship between the organization and its environment, the internal structure, values, and goals of the organization itself, with appropriate attention to the roles actors play within the organization, and finally, to the consciousness of the members themselves.

The following sections include some of the more relevant theoretical bases for examining the issues of resistance and accommodation, and the crises of legitimation and motivation within the Catholic Church which have affected religious orders. The next theoretical focus is on the meso or intermediate level, namely, the question of organizational decline.

Organizational Decline

Most of the literature on organizational decline pertains to economic organizations: Issues of power, resources, authority, and efficiency (Ouchi, 1980:397) have been emphasized as essential for survival, often without attention to ideological factors. The form of an organization must be considered: Is it utilitarian,

coercive, or normative, for example? The goals of an organization must be taken into account: Are they pragmatic or ambiguous, short range or long range? Both the form and goals of an organization will determine the type of compliance required to hold the organization together. Miles (1980:440) outlines the dimensions of organizational failure as technical (failed efficiency); political (loss of legitimation); and cultural (loss of ideological bases). Termination of an organization may also mean that it has reached its goals (Miles, 1980:443), has outlived its usefulness, and and may merely survive temporarily in dysfunctional persistence. An alternate typology of the sources of decline are organizational atrophy, political vulnerability, loss of legitimacy, and environmental entropy (Whetten, 1980:355-362).

These models suggest that organizational decline is a combination of internal problems as well as conflicts between the organization and its environment. Both must be taken into account, as well as the circumstances specific to religious orders as a type of organization. These will be discussed below.

Environmental Considerations: Ebaugh uses Cameron's (1988) definition of organizational decline as the deterioration of an organization's adaptation to its domain or microniche and, as a result, the reduction of resources within the organization (Ebaugh, 1993:4). Historically religious orders of women have had an important environmental niche

within the Catholic Church, satisfying not only the needs of the Church but of society at large. They created vast educational systems, established and staffed hospitals, and administered social service agencies. Yet it has been argued convincingly that female religious communities as we have known them are experiencing an unprecedented and irreversible pattern of decline (Blake, 1986; Ebaugh, 1993; McClory, 1987; Woodward, 1990). With the expansion of government into the areas of education, health care, and social services, the more pragmatic goals of Catholic nuns were displaced. In addition, the normalization of Catholics in the United States -- that is, the acceptance of Catholic immigrant groups into mainstream America -- displaced their religious goals as well.

Ebaugh (1993) summarizes the exogenous and structural factors leading to the decline of religious orders of women, presenting a process model which calls for further empirical comparisons, particularly if one adds to this the experience of a contemplative order. According to Ebaugh, for normative organizations there are four possible types of exogenous factors likely to lead to demise: (1) goals have been fulfilled, leaving the organization no reason for existence; (2) organizational goals become irrelevant to a changing society; (3) loss of a resource base; and (4) other organizations take over the functions of the particular organization (Ebaugh, 1993:173-174). A comparative analysis of both exogenous and structural

factors might explain why one order may be experiencing more rapid decline than the other.

Based on existing literature, Ebaugh (1993) summarizes the predicted pattern experienced by declining organizations as centralization of authority, reallocation of resources, manipulation of the environment, internal discord leading to turf battles, fear of risk taking, and decreased morale and increased cynicism of members. She then proceeds with a powerful analysis of convent communities as a deviant case in that many of these predicted outcomes did not at all come to pass! In fact, authority structures in convents became more democratized, little was done to manipulate the environment, turf battles were not evident, and morale not terribly impaired. These contingencies or practices represent what an organization might do to offset the effects of decline, factors that were not substantiated empirically for religious orders. This finding reinforces the fact that existing theories focusing on decline do not apply to normative organizations.

Internal Considerations: Religious groups have been classified by Etzioni (1961:40) as "normative" organizations; that is,

Normative organizations are organizations in which normative power is the major source of control over most lower participants, whose orientation to the organization is characterized by high commitment. Compliance in normative organizations rests principally on internalization of directives accepted as legitimate. Leadership, rituals, manipulation of

social and prestige symbols, and resocialization are among the more important techniques of control used (Etzioni, 1961:40).

Etzioni (1968) contends that there must be congruence between tasks and control forms within organizations. Those organizations which use the correct control form for its tasks will survive and prosper. Religious organizations require normative controls and high commitment to insure acceptance of directives and means of achieving them. Compliance relies on the internalization of directives, fostered through leadership, rituals, the manipulation of social and prestige symbols, and resocialization (Etzioni, 1968:40-41). The type of normative compliance typical of convents before Vatican II produced what Durkheim called "mechanical solidarity," (Durkheim in Simpson, 1963:43). The minimization of differences between individuals was characteristic of community life before Vatican II when nuns performed similar tasks and the division of labor was based on age and rank (Briody and Sullivan, 1988:314). After Vatican II Pope John XXIII had called on religious to go out into the world to serve the needs of the people. Tasks shifted from education to social work. Because specific tasks and goals had changed, input and free expression and a voice in decision-making encouraged, normative controls that had been used previously were constantly being questioned. Networks expanded and individual talents and interests were taken into account. "Vocation" came to be defined in

occupationally-based terms. Based on a division of labor, a new kind of solidarity became evident which might be called "organic," requiring a new type of interdependence and a lesser degree of automatic compliance. Any voluntary organization requires some degree of internalized acceptance of goals and self-motivated compliance. Changing what had been internalized is a painful process. When many of the symbols and ritual that had served as normative controls were eliminated, the burden of control shifted from the organization to the individual. Yet goals, control forms, and internal solidarity are not sufficient in explaining why an organization loses its environmental niche in the first place. In order to explore what has happened to religious orders of women, a model is required that takes into account environmental factors as well as the resultant legitimation and motivation crises that take place when an organization's viability is called into question.

Taking a systems approach, Galanter (1989) identifies four functions necessary for any system to survive, incorporating both internal and external factors. These are: transformation, monitoring, feedback, and boundary maintenance. The extent to which these functions are being carried out will determine the system's survival. If we use this model as a basic framework, we can then compare the relative decline of two religious orders, taking both structural and exogenous factors into account. Once the

system is understood in terms of its relationship with its environment, internal problems become easier to identify. In other words, religious orders of women need to be understood in terms of their relationship with the institution of the Catholic Church, as well as the wider society in which they exist, before the impact of change on the members of these communities can be understood. One of the effects of organizational change has been a change in status for members of these organizations, a change which might be characterized as that of "status passage," a more micro-level phenomenon.

Status Passage

The movement from one social status to another involves relative amounts of identity disruption directly proportional to the extent to which individuals have internalized the role expectations and obligations associated with a particular status. Some occupational statuses, for example, involve an intense resocialization process that requires more psychological investment by the individual. Studies of work and occupations document the professionalization process undergone in the more committed professions. Khleif (1981), for example, develops a typology of professionalization based on "rites of passage" which include the transmission of a new set of symbols learned through a process of enculturation fostered through adherence to "etiquette, code, and creed" (Khleif, 1981:167-169). Although this process can be identified in

the training of many occupational groups (cf., for example, Dornbusch, 1955; Haas, 1972; Rohlen, 1984), becoming a nun includes more clear-cut rites than most, since symbolism and ritual are inherent in convent culture. Even more importantly, the religious life is entered as a presumed lifetime commitment and would be considered a "master role" affecting all other aspects of one's identity. When one leaves a master status to enter another, whether voluntarily or not, identity is disrupted.

Status passage is a reflection of social change. New roles are created and others eliminated due to urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and technology (San Giovanni, 1978:3-4). Micro analysis focuses on such issues as accommodation to status loss, changing role partners, and incorporating new expectations and obligations into existing roles. Glaser and Strauss (1971) developed a formal theory of status passage, including the concept of "emergent" roles, meaning these are created and shaped by the incumbents as they go along because there are no prior guidelines or social supports for this process (Glaser and Strauss, 1971:85-86). This model has been applied by some researchers to the "ex-nun," which is a relatively new status in modern society (Ebaugh, 1984; San Giovanni, 1978). Some forms of role exit become institutionalized, such as that of the "ex-wife" and as this ex-role becomes more common and accepted, less role strain may be experienced.

San Giovanni (1978) extends the emergent role passage concept to include persons who either create new roles or "modify the institutionalized pathways of existing ones" (San Giovanni, 1978:5). This is perhaps a more fitting model for nuns who have chosen to remain in the convent. The ex-nun is creating a new role, while those who remain in an old status must chart a different course -- a process of "bridging" old status scripts with new ones.

Studies of ex-nuns indicate that the most successful role passage is experienced by those who have successfully integrated the convent experience into their present lives (Ebaugh, 1984; San Giovanni, 1978:139). Because role acceptance relies on the definitions supplied by others, it is more difficult for those experiencing emergent passage because of lack of precedents for the appropriate behavior for oneself as well as one's role partners; that is, you need others to be yourself. Social validation is necessary for one to see oneself as a new person.

The passage of nun into secular life is in many respects a "solo passage" (San Giovanni, 1978:150) because her success means embracing new role relations grounded in the present and future rather than the past. Glaser and Strauss (1971:116-117) point out that a person may also go through a passage as a member of a "cohort," which is more characteristic of those persons in institutionalized statuses. In this case, there may be discrepancies between the person and the group; that is, persons are concerned

with having some control over their collective passage, while also gaining some control over their individual ones (Glaser and Strauss, 1971:117). Nuns who remain in an old status must find a way to bridge former experience and views of self to new experiences -- to integrate past, present, and future in a satisfying way, and to do so with the collective. While many nuns still live in community, many of the sisters do not and these would have even fewer structural supports to guide their role transitions. In this case, they may have to create means of support not made available by the collective (their individual orders) or by the institution itself (the Catholic Church). This process of finding and maintaining group and personal identity using the fragments of a shattered institutionalized status might be referred to as "emergent status-reconstruction."

Emergent Status-Reconstruction

Institutionalized roles are supported by an underlying structure that generates rules and symbolic codes, in effect linking person and role.

The structure of cultural codes is causally linked not only to the behavioral and interpersonal activities of individuals but also to the institutional parameters within which such activities are conducted (Turner, 1991:501).

Ritual provides reinforcement of a lifestyle: individual and collective ritual expresses deeply held meanings and affirms cultural structures by embellishing certain messages, reinforcing values, designating key positions,

and dramatizing certain relations and events (Wuthnow, 1987:132). When there is a discrepancy between the moral codes and the real programs in which people are engaged, social situations become ambiguous and the level of uncertainty among members increases so that new ideologies are likely to be produced (Wuthnow, 1987:145).

In essence, cultural assumptions can be wounded and ritual is an attempt to heal those wounds (Curran, 1989:141). If ritual fails to reinforce those basic cultural assumptions, new assumptions may have to be adopted, along with their own supportive ritual. Many of traditional rituals and symbols that shaped and maintained the identity of Catholic nuns have been altered or eliminated. That is not to say that prior to Vatican II the symbols of convent culture were not being challenged by broader cultural clashes. For example, changes in the American family and education systems were making the transition to convent life more difficult (Curran, 1989:137). Some of these clashes were part of the issues being addressed by Vatican II; but once fully addressed by the Church, the symbolic world of convents was undermined. The cloister has been replaced with a more apostolic focus: rituals are less rigid and not mandatory; and most orders have dropped altogether or modernized the traditional religious habit. While symbolic changes have effectively reduced the barriers between the nun and the outside world, they have also altered the ways in which nuns now view

themselves and each other.

While structures may constrain or promote action, individuals are not passive responders to social structure. Bourdieu, for example, discusses the ability of persons to use their capacities for thought and reflection to create options for creative action within the larger parameters; that is to say that actors create new cultural and social phenomena. While culture has a structure that is a reality that constrains individuals, there is room for flexibility, for the subjective and creative aspects of social action that operate within those constraints (Bourdieu, 1991). It is this process of actors creating and shaping their own social environment through the creation and/or manipulation of new and/or existing symbols that I identify as "emergent status-reconstruction," a phenomenon that applies to the current experience of contemporary American nuns. The emergent character of this process is emphasized in that there are no precedents for this new role. This dissertation will attempt to identify aspects of this process of status and role reconstruction among Catholic sisters. As "cognitive minorities" in a changing cultural milieu, the consciousness of contemporary Catholic nuns provides an example of the dynamic relationship between self and culture in identity formation, a process that has taken on an emergent character under circumstances of change.

The extent to which this is managed successfully

reflects the extent to which the basic human needs of individuals are met. The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were based on the denial of human needs as virtuous; ironically, once these vows were reinterpreted, many religious experienced personal dissatisfaction. The question then becomes which needs are more potent in human beings: personal self-expression and freedom vs. response and recognition derived from the community? A discussion of human needs adds insights at the most fundamental level -- that of the motivation of individuals -- and reveals as well what happens to the group or community when it fails to allow members to fulfill these needs.

It is only through the group that the individual can have his or her basic needs satisfied. The group in turn foists needs upon the individual (Samuels, 1984:59).

Lack of need fulfillment has repercussions for both person and group. Finally, I would like to emphasize gender as a variable because the experience of nuns may be comparable to that of other women in institutionalized roles.

In summary, an understanding of what has happened to religious orders of women requires a combination of different levels of analysis. The role of religion has changed in modern society. Organized religion, including Catholicism, no longer has the ability to mandate beliefs and values; in fact, modern secular values are often in direct conflict with traditional Judeo-Christian ideals and sometimes the former are even adopted by religious

organizations themselves. By mid-century, the Catholic Church had reached a critical point in accommodation to modern American norms and cultural values. As will be developed in later chapters, the decisions made during Vatican Council II set in motion the organizational changes in religious communities that have had far-reaching consequences. In addition, religious organizations can be analyzed sociologically in terms of their internal structure as well as their utility to the larger institution of which they are a part. Structural changes have resulted in a shifting of the status and accompanying role relationships for members of religious communities, a social-psychological process that will be explored in this dissertation.

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical perspectives which I have found relevant to the analysis of religious orders of women, from the more macro view of the relationship between Catholicism and society, to the meso level of organizational change and decline, and finally to the emergent status-reconstruction process of Roman Catholic nuns. Aspects of these perspectives will be drawn upon throughout the dissertation in relation to each level of analysis addressed.

The following chapter discusses the methodology used to pursue the theoretical questions posed above and deals with some of the issues that arose as a result of a qualitative approach.

CHAPTER III

BREAKING THE SILENCE: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This chapter deals with some methodological issues that emerged in the course of this fieldwork, including the sociological study of religious phenomena, confronting researcher bias, status barriers, lack of official statistics, linguistic and terminological difficulties, and the interpretation of data gathered through qualitative methods. It is argued that by adopting a research stance appropriate to the group being studied -- that is, attempting to give the natives of the situation their voice -- many of these barriers can be overcome.

Method and Sample

My data on religious orders of women came from a variety of sources, including in-depth interviews with members of religious orders, historical records, Church documents, and participant observation over an 18 month period of fieldwork. Interviews were conducted with a total of 34 members of five religious communities. After preliminary interviews, I began to focus on one active order and one monastic community within one diocese in the eastern region of the United States; therefore, I limited subsequent contacts to members of one active community and one contemplative order. Each required a different type

of methodology.

I interviewed 23 members of the active community, visiting several convents, residences, and workplaces, as well their Motherhouse, where I spent time in the archives and was allowed to interview, as well as have informal conversations with, several of the sisters in residence. I also attended formal meetings at the Motherhouse and participated in some of their daily activities, talking with sisters in the diningroom, infirmary, and in their archival library.

Due to restrictions on the interactions with contemplative nuns, my fieldwork on this group consisted of four lengthy interviews with the Mother Superior and two additional day-long visits as a guest of the community, during which I was assigned a room, was allowed to observe and to participate in some of their daily activities, and to have some, although limited, interactions with several of the sisters. Various phone conversations from time to time with the Mother Superior helped to clear up vague areas and remaining questions and to correct some of my interpretations of their way of life.

The sample contains a ratio of active to cloistered orders that is analagous to those in the state under study, as well as the country. (It is estimated that contemplative orders represent from 4 to 10 percent of all religious orders of women.) The sample contains age

cohorts that reflect the demographics of other orders nationwide. The average age of the active sisters was 68 years and the average number of years spent in the convent was 50, reflecting the average ages found nationwide in convents today. (The average age of sisters in the U.S. in 1986 was 62-63 (McClory, 1987:26 and is approaching 70 (Blake, 1986:185; Ebaugh, 1993:59). Age cohorts for the contemplative order were not available, but generally it was indicated to me that there was a far more equal balance of younger and older age groups than in the apostolic order.

In addition, since structural factors were of interest, I sought out those in specific administrative positions within their orders, such as the Mother Superiors, Formation Directresses, an officer of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and other administrators. Although a prepared interview guide was used, open-ended questions often allowed extended discussion and emergent themes to develop. Personal interviews ranged from 1 to 3 hours each, with the average interview time being 2 hours and 15 minutes. Questions addressed included their reasons for choosing the religious life, descriptions of the training period, how they interpreted and coped with the changes leading up to and following Vatican II, how their work lives changed, the kinds of work they are doing now, living arrangements and relations within their communities, their beliefs on

current theological, as well as secular political questions, and their thoughts on the future of religious orders of women. Sisters were interviewed in a semi-structured style, using a prepared interview guide (see Appendix D), most questions allowing for open-ended responses. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all respondents. To insure privacy of persons and their communities, I have used pseudonyms for specific persons, orders, and locations. Also in the interests of anonymity, references to published archival and historical works have been omitted but are coded and listed in Appendix B.

In addition to interviews and participant observation, other sources of data included Church records, the documents of Vatican II (see Appendix A for listing), histories of the orders, often published by and provided by the sisters themselves, and other archival materials, such as letters, journals, and membership records provided by the orders. Conversations with members of the Roman Catholic clergy, including the Vicar for Religious of the Diocese, 4 pastors, 3 priests, and two chaplains serving elderly sisters helped to supplement some of the other data.

The major source of data came from the sisters themselves, who shared many hours with me in conversations, both formal and informal, and provided me with documents and references several times during the

course of this fieldwork. Despite the cooperation of the sisters, several methodological issues arose which bear mentioning. The remainder of this chapter addresses some of these issues, beginning with the sociological study of religious phenomena as it affects and is affected by purported researcher bias.

Religion and Sociology

Although my background as a Catholic allowed me easier access to respondents and my experience as a Catholic female growing up in the 1950s provided a working knowledge of religious language, tradition, theology, and scripture, this same reference point created doubts in my mind during the early phases of this research as to its appropriateness. Reconciling a religious orientation with a sociological one has plagued other researchers as well. Some find it necessary to preface their work with a clear statement of the separation of their theoretical concerns from theology (Berger, 1967:x), while others comment on the perceived inappropriateness of religious members as sociological subjects (Wilson, in Campbell-Jones, 1978:16) and the resistance to applying organizational theory to a sacred institution (Wittberg, 1989:148-149). The relationship between researcher and researched, especially the exploitative nature of it at times, can only be exacerbated by these kinds of doubts.

A specific religious orientation such as Catholicism also raises the question of researcher bias; that is, can

one study objectively aspects of an institution that has shaped one's perceptions and values? Both validity and reliability of "insider" accounts might be called into question. Beginning a research project with some previous knowledge of a group -- common points of reference and a common language -- can be a decided advantage. On the other hand, studying one's own culture, or an important aspect of it, involves the possibility of taking too much for granted, not reporting what is already second nature to the person since it does not appear to be "new knowledge," taking liberties in reporting since those less knowledgeable will not be in a position to refute what the researcher says, and the temptation to become a "champion" of one's own heritage, a "voice" in defense of a vulnerable group, consciously or unconsciously distorting the facts or suppressing information that may be negative while emphasizing that which is positive.

On the other hand, those who study their own may feel more compelled to explain their "insiderness," providing a valid way of confronting researcher bias. I have never been a Roman Catholic nun, yet my contacts with them extended over the course of my childhood and we did at one time share a common culture. It is in that sense, that I consider myself a type of "insider." Yet my training in sociology has given me a new way to view what was once part of my own socialization, to discover and confront some of my previous misconceptions, and in some cases, to

re-discover taken-for-granted meanings that I still accept.

Other researchers addressing the problem of cultural bias have cited the importance of distance, of physical and social separation, as well as scientific training, before returning to a familiar field; for example, Arab Middle Eastern women anthropologists who have researched their own cultures point out the benefits of exposure to the Western anthropological community first, which allows a critical examination of one's values and ideas, as well as an opportunity to explain how one's relative social position affects one's methodology (Shami, 1988:115). The discovery of significant discrepancies between long-held beliefs and reality are more poignant and these "breakdowns" (Agar, 1986:25-27) that make us sit up and question ourselves, become pivotal points in the research process. For example, Joseph (1988) assumed, upon returning to Lebanon as an anthropologist, that she knew her own cultural family patterns, but rediscovered them firsthand with new insights, thus reinforcing their genuineness. Many of her observations were only brought to consciousness by her ability to step outside and take a second look at her own culture, her pre-American one.

Morsy (1988) attacks the question of objectivity and the ability of the "outsider" to see better," characterizing this notion as analagous to the "scientific colonialism" approach from a "distinctive other" tradition

(Morsy, 1988:70). Shami (1988) states that in evaluating research, the "determining factor is the intellectual rigor with which the subject is explored (Shami, 1988:115-116). That the observer is part of what is observed (Khleif, 1974:396), that the biography of the observer crucial to analysis (Agar, 1986, Lofland and Lofland, 1984; Johnson, 1978; Khleif, 1974; Reinharz, 1979), are points that have become recognized as important to qualitative methodology, a methodology which calls for honesty and openness in reporting.

In this case, my religious status was beneficial in terms of access and dialogue, while my training as a sociologist helped me to see things more objectively. Yet I would be remiss if I did not admit a struggle with preconceived notions regarding religious orders of women. I knew virtually nothing about female monastic communities, but I did have much exposure to active sisters. The nuns I knew were strong authority figures, not perceived as victims of a traditional, patriarchal institution. I did not think of them as "persons" (but perhaps even as supra-human apparitions at times), nor did I see them in terms of their gender. We did not interact with them on a personal level; yet there was something appealing and liberating about being in contact with them. There were negative memories associated with them as well, such as the harsh discipline and dogmatic nature of their convictions which we were asked to accept

without question. In essence, I had mixed feelings towards these women who had shaped my childhood, a combination of respect and abhorrence, awe and fear.

It is only now in light of knowledge about the psychology of community living, as well as the cultural conflicts taking place in convents at that time, that I feel in a better position to analyze the phenomenon of religious orders of women in a sociological context. On the other hand, confronting what I take to be personal bias and/or a sense of reluctance does not mean that these feelings disappear, nor that they will not hinder some aspects of the field experience as crucial components of a particular method. In the end my respect for religious communities held sway over the adherence to formal or "received" research techniques. Rather than forcing traditional scientific methodology onto the subject at hand, I adapted my stance as researcher in order to accommodate and account for the types of social entities I was studying. In essence, this meant taking both active and passive modes in collecting data.

Active vs. Passive Modes

The tensions between my scientific sociological training and my socialization as a traditional Catholic were similar to those identified by Joseph (1988), who described her role as passive observer as much more comfortable but less "intellectually legitimate" from a methodological point of view (Joseph, 1988:40). When

actively seeking numerical data, reading archival material, and interviewing, the researcher is taking an active stance; in essence, controlling what is being researched by directing questions and seeking information, having already decided what is important. In contrast, the silent observer blends into the background, letting the data come to her, a more passive and less traditional means of gathering data. In order to continue this fieldwork, I was obliged to do both and I believe they are equally valid. While in the active mode, one needs to stand out -- to assert oneself as the researcher, the objectifier, the "observer"; when in the passive mode, one seeks to blend-in so as not to disturb the ongoing social milieu; one is a "participant."

This, I feel, is the tension between participation and observation, the crucial, rather anomalous hyphen of the "participant-observer." As Levi-Strauss has said, the "observer" gets to understand structure and also culture, the elements of stability; the "participant" sees process, that is, the equilibrium of things, the ingredients of change, the dynamism beneath the surface. I very much felt this way in the cloister. There was a feeling of wanting to hide all that was personal and revealing about the self, including your clothing, your hair, and your demeanor. The clash between the values of all things secular, including the scientific community, and this unique atmosphere of "other-worldly" concerns is the

loudest sound you will hear in the cloister: it is the rift between the sacred and the profane, an almost deafening silence. Yet by experiencing what the nuns call "a day in the desert" on more than one occasion, I felt that I had discovered something very tangible about a particular form of social community that does have a structure and a pattern and can indeed be analyzed sociologically. In a sense, one could grasp the cloistered nuns as a community better this way, rather than as a group of individuals.

The conflict between active and passive modes, that is, the recommended, traditionally aggressive stance of obtaining data vs. the reliance on more intuitive means of understanding, is perhaps best illustrated by the problems of data collection that I encountered, including status barriers, lack of official statistics, and linguistic difficulties.

Status Barriers

My position as researcher presented the first barrier to be crossed. Initially many of the nuns expressed concern about not having been interviewed before and curiosity about why I was interested in researching them.

This is a first...I guess people want to know what we're all about. I've never been interviewed before (Field Notes 4:44, 10/19/92).

Although confidentiality and anonymity had been assured at the outset, many asked for reassurances along the way, since there was fear of how their comments might

be interpreted by others. They appeared reluctant to say anything that might be misinterpreted or reflect poorly on their orders. Questions such as "who will be reading this?" and comments such as "don't write this down" or "this is off the record" indicated to me sensitive areas not to be probed. This was also an indication of their trust in my discretion. It also made the use of a tape recorder impracticable. I do not feel that this was a detriment because I take rapid shorthand and the sisters often repeated statements at my request and/or had me read back their statements for accuracy, as I had indicated that they might be quoted in the final write-up. The taping of interviews, while preferable, is an indication of the objectivist scientific community's notions about the best ways to collect data. I feel certain that in this case rapport would have been more difficult to establish and much of value would have been lost.

Many nuns expressed doubts as to whether they were giving me the kinds of information I really wanted. Comments such as "is this what you're looking for?" and "was that important?" seemed to be typical of almost every interview. One nun in particular said she "did not feel comfortable with intelligent women," a comment that indicated that she felt incapable of answering my questions appropriately. The irony here is that she appeared to be one of the more articulate and intelligent women I have spoken to.

Another status-related issue was that most women spoke in terms of "we," rather than being self-focused. This may have been a function of their having lived in community for so long. Many of their statements reflected this, such as:

...there isn't the depth of our life that we had when we were a community...we are so diverse...different jobs with different hours (Field Notes 4:56, 10/19/92).

We are independent, intelligent women capable of making decisions (Field Notes 3:38, 9/30/92).

Everything that reflects on me reflects on others (Field Notes 20:245, 12/29/93).

When asked for self-descriptions, phrases such as "our life," "our community," and "our future" were often used. Reticence about self-revelation was evident in the comment of one nun who stated, "I hope you don't mind if I give my personal views," (Field Notes 1:2, 9/15/92) as though one might think this inappropriate for a nun to do. The statuses of nun and female, both secondary statuses within the Catholic Church, were reflected in the interactions with sisters. My status as Catholic undoubtedly aided in establishing rapport with these women, while my position as sociologist was a barrier that needed to be crossed. It was my status as woman that served to be the most important asset in bridging other status boundaries. In most cases, once comfortable with me, the nuns appeared to speak freely, and I believe honestly, about their beliefs and experiences. Traditional sanctions against

interactions with males may have made the rapport extremely difficult and there is no doubt that I would not have gained entry into the cloister had I not been a woman. A process of referrals gave me access to several of the active sisters, while acceptance into the contemplative community was at first more difficult. I had no referral here but had heard of this group and called to ask for an interview; over the course of a year they gradually accepted me and appeared to accept my research as legitimate, an acceptance that may indeed have been facilitated by gender. In addition to status boundaries, problems of gathering data using traditional methods also emerged.

Numbers and Talk

Two of the most popular sources of sociological data are the survey, sometimes in the form of a structured interview, and numerical data, either gathered through the former method or provided in summary form from published records. For the scientific community, numbers published in print often have a salience -- one is tempted to say "holiness" -- that takes precedence over other kinds of information. Data gathered from respondents is often quantified; that is, the statements of respondents are translated into numerical data. This is most easily done with measurement variables or straightforward categorical variables, when questions are posed in the form of yes or no, or when respondents are asked to answer questions in a

scale-like format. Sociologists have addressed the problems of analyzing interviews that are less structured by using computerized programs which have been developed that help to quantify interview data. This traditional approach to data collection from human subjects means that sociologists are generally bound by two things: numbers and talk, both of which presented problems in the course of this research.

Numbers: While there exist some official numerical summaries on female religious orders as a whole, these are limited to current membership by year. More specific information on particular orders in this diocese was very hard to collect. Several phone calls to the diocesan offices were unsuccessful because many of the numbers I was looking for do not exist. In addition, numerical information on contemplative orders is even more sparse, and I learned that survey data from them is not easily forthcoming. The Vicar for Religious of the Diocese is in effect a moot position today, as individual orders are keeping track of their own memberships. This was another indication to me of the lack of communication and connection that sisters have today with the formal hierarchy. Any statistics, other than the formally published numbers in the annual Official Catholic Directories, had to be obtained from the sisters themselves. One response from a male diocesan official after my repeated phone calls for official statistics was,

"Who cares about a few old nuns?"

In addition to the lack of official information, the reliance upon numbers is not characteristic of women in monastic communities. They have little use for this type of information and if they do have it, it is considered beyond the purview of outsiders. On the other hand, these women were forthright with me and provided me with as much information as they felt they could, sometimes compiling numbers for me.

Talk: Another traditional means of data collection was open-ended interviewing; that is, talk. While neither group (active or cloistered) are in the habit of being interviewed, the active sisters were a source of much information. The contemplative sisters, on the other hand, do not generally speak with outsiders. I was to conduct any interviews only with the Mother Superior, who proved to be extremely forthcoming and candid with information and allowed me to visit the monastery on different occasions. We also had several phone conversations. During the course of these interviews, as well as other interactions during my stays at the monastery, the issue of "talk" in general presented problems much more fundamental than merely being allowed formal interviews. The following section addresses some of the linguistic difficulties encountered which sometimes differed by group.

Linguistic Barriers

Interviews with the nuns were characterized by four different aspects of language: religious language, lack of shared meanings, inadequacy of language, and the rule of silence.

Religious Language: My Catholic background made religious language easier to interpret. Words such as "vocation," "faith," and "grace" may not be as easily translatable to the layperson. (A Glossary is provided in Appendix C.) Yet there were times when elaboration on these themes became necessary; for example, the real meaning of vocation to them and how they came to experience the "calling." Often these issues were ones that could not be probed to their core due to my own reluctance to reduce religious phenomena to sociological explanations. In other cases they were vital clues to understanding; for example, in explaining the great faith she saw in the elderly parishioners she was serving, one nun remarked, "I don't have that kind of creative faith" (Field Notes 6:84, 2/7/93). Pursuit of the real meaning behind this statement led to a discussion of the ways in which the contemporary nun, often cut off from her community due to separate living arrangements today, must, in essence, create ritual to replace the institutionalized structures the collectivity relied upon in the past. This nun indicated that she was learning how to do this by emulating the examples of lay people; e.g., building a

shrine in the den of her apartment. From this simple statement arose a theme that was to become central to my dissertation; that is, the "emergent status-reconstruction" process that contemporary nuns are undergoing due to structural and organizational changes since Vatican II.

Meaning Inversions: With regard to the cloistered nuns, there were several instances of misinterpretations attributed to lack of a shared meaning system. In many ways the cloister is an "inversion" of everything on the outside. The values of individualism, freedom, and physical comfort are not valued as they are in the outside world; for example, reference by the Mother Superior to physical strength as important in the cloister was misinterpreted by me to mean emotional strength, as one would think physical abilities would be necessary for the sisters doing outside physical labor. She indeed did mean that the fully cloistered nun required physical stamina to maintain an interior life, but that it was the weaker individuals who were assigned to physical tasks. Other examples of linguistic confusion included their definitions of such things as hierarchy, authority, and gender, which are elaborated on in a later chapter. These difficulties made even clearer the faulty preconceptions that one carries by virtue of culture -- that is, cultural conditioning -- and the importance of shared meaning systems to sustain meaningful communication.

Lack of Language: Lack of language for articulating some aspects of the life of the nun was also noted. Commenting on the linguistic aspects of interviewing, Marjorie DeVault (1990) affirms that "language is often incongruent with the realities of women's experience" (DeVault, 1990:96). She systematically noted hesitancies in speech during explanations women gave of their household tasks and developed strategies for "recovering" those aspects of experience that are left out when women "translate" their accounts, eliminating what they feel is unimportant or difficult to explain. Women translate by using words that are as close as possible to what they mean but often miss the mark, for example, using "housework" to refer to all their work tasks in the home (DeVault, 1990:102). Difficulties in expression may stem from feelings of unimportance of the work or lack of words to describe the work in terms we can understand. Dorothy Smith (1987) refers to this problem as a gap in social knowledge or a "line of fault" in women's experience. Aspects of family work are difficult to label and therefore are not a part of shared language. The work of caring and service which includes an emotive component have also been identified as "invisible work" in that the worth of women's work hinges upon its value on the labor market (Daniels, 1987; Wichroski, 1994). It is difficult to conceptualize the caring and nurturant aspects inherent in social relations as "work," due to the "folk understanding" of work as paid

labor (Daniels, 1987:403). DeVault presents a powerful analysis of women's work without names -- that is, by describing the work without formal linguistic terms to define that "work" -- in order not to lose the essence of the kinds of work they do (DeVault, 1991).

Similarly, the work of nuns is not necessarily conceptualized in their own minds as "paid labor." (One nun recalled how she was punished for referring to the baking of altar bread as a "job." She was reminded that this task was a privilege.) The work of caring and service always performed by sisters has now increased. The edicts of Vatican II shifted the emphasis from monastic life to active participation in the world and has meant that the work of active sisters now more closely resembles the work of many women in secular society. While women in general perform services in the home and are also overrepresented in the service sector of the economy, nuns are now more actively engaged in social work and social justice endeavors. Women are most often engaged in forms of "emotion work" in private life and in "emotional labor" in the occupational world (Hochschild, 1983); that is, in the interest of harmony, the manipulation of emotion in the self and others is required in both private and public spheres.

As with other women, these aspects of labor are difficult for sisters to articulate; for example, one nun had difficulty describing her work as head of food

services in a novitiate (a training school) and this required extensive probing. When asked about how she felt about her job, she said, "What I did was me" (Field Notes 4:85, 10/19/92). From here we engaged in a long discussion about the creative ways she had to make the food more appealing to the girls. She said that she used baking and cooking as an outlet since when she joined the order she was directed to go into education even though she would have preferred to do domestic work. This was common at that time in that the vow of obedience precluded choice of assignments for women religious. She indicated that she was still troubled by the reference to domestic work as "dirty work." To help explain this, she referred to a passage in Luke (10:38-42), the story of Mary and Martha, indicating that Christ was more in favor of Mary who sat and listened to him while Martha was busy in the kitchen. She refused to accept this interpretation of Christ's preference for those who worship over those who do necessary tasks in the service of others.

On two other occasions passages from scripture were used to help explain the nuns' reference points, legitimations for their actions, and sometimes discrepancies in that they questioned the interpretations of these passages by male clerical authority. These are devices used to help in the articulation process -- to communicate to the listener a better understanding of their lives and work and the ways they interpret and

legitimate them.

The problem of lack of language indicates the need for the researcher to become an active listener, listening with a "third ear" so to speak. To capture the essence of women's experience in the absence of vocabulary, it becomes necessary to be attuned to other clues and cues to understanding. Facial expressions, body language, and particularly paralanguage, such as pauses, silence, hesitations, tone and pitch, are signals that indicate a need for assistance and further attention. Just as phrases such as "you know" came to seem like a request for understanding (DeVault, 1990:103), there are a variety of signals that may indicate that the respondent needs encouragement in order to explain experience. Statements that appear incongruous at first, or even trivial, may be a source of important information. When words are inadequate, no pre-designed survey or interview guide can yield the kinds of information that emerge when the listener is actively engaged in the person's responses. In this connection, we turn now to another linguistic barrier, that is, the rule of silence.

The Rule of Silence: One of the first things I noticed while visiting the contemplative order was a sign that read, "Silence is a beautiful hymn we sing to God." It did not take me long to realize that this is a value that nuns take seriously and truly uphold. Thus, along with verbal misunderstandings in general, there is the interpretation

of self-imposed silence. The rule of silence does not mean that the nuns are mute; rather, they are polite and welcoming but do not engage in what they consider to be "unnecessary talk." As an American in post-industrial society, I take it for granted that people want to talk. We are encouraged by our ethos of individualism and the psychological emphasis of our lives to express ourselves, to vent our feelings. Open exchange is an important American value and one that we believe is a sign of sincerity, openness, and honesty; our educational system promotes participation, self-activation, and freedom of expression. We abhor silence and are trained to avoid it, both socially and professionally. (Sociologists presenting and publishing papers is a form of talk. The American corporation, adopting a family-type model of social control, now encourages employees to become more personally engaged in their work through seminars; hence, the expansion of human resource departments to design sessions where people can talk.) We are not trained as Americans, nor as sociologists, to listen to and interpret silence. For us it is empty and meaningless. If the researcher cannot speak directly with respondents, even observation of them in interaction is difficult to interpret if there is no spoken language. This raises an issue that can be problematic for traditional methodologists; that is, what if communication loses verbal structure entirely? In the absence of words, are

inference and observation enough to yield information? Without clearcut frames of reference for what is going on, one is forced to become descriptive only. For the sociologist, this is a critical problem because conjecture is not sufficient. Yet the time I spent in the cloister, although brief, gave me an understanding of what non-verbal communication can be. Often upon leaving my room, when I would return there would be gifts left for me -- a calendar, cookies, a note or card -- attempts to make me feel welcome. The nuns spoke with me only on their terms; for example, many said they were praying for me and what they called "my project." Their daily prayers and singing as a group are a form of communication, a tacit understanding to one another that they share the same symbolic world. (Chapter VI on the contemplative case study order addresses some of these issues in more detail.) I bring this issue up here because it is a methodological problem for those of us used to traditional sociological means of interpreting actively-verbal data. In this case, I am reporting what I observed, adding information that I feel was substantiated by the nuns themselves in terms of their meanings for things.

In summary, this fieldwork required an understanding of religious language, overcoming discrepancies in meaning systems, articulating unnamed aspects of experience, and interpreting nonverbal communication. The use of both active and passive modes of research became necessary, as

well as devising strategies appropriate to each group studied (the active and the cloistered orders). To abandon that which cannot be measured easily is to overlook a portion of reality simply because it cannot be examined using contemporary methods.

While status barriers, uncommon language, and discrepant meaning systems can be overcome, lack of language and interpretations of silence create difficulties in the final analysis. Yet the problem of translating knowledge gained in this way into sociological discourse is not an insurmountable one. With regard to articulation, although it is valid to proceed with analysis despite the available labels for things, it is equally valid to attempt to name things that EXIST. As DeVault points out, "By noticing silences and absences, we begin to talk and write beyond them" (DeVault, 1991:227). By doing so we are taking seriously the experience and work of women, and ultimately their contributions, and can work towards creating an appropriate vocabulary in order to learn more and write more about them. With respect to silence as a preferred means of communication, we must address the issue of what is being communicated and the significance of this type of interaction as distinct from commonly-accepted, American cultural rules regarding it. In the first case, we wish to break the silence, and in the second, merely to understand it better. In essence, we must recognize the

silences we are confronted with, discuss what they mean, and, if need be, devise strategies to overcome them.

In this chapter, I have discussed methodology and presented some issues that arose during the course of this fieldwork, including facing researcher bias, status barriers, lack of official statistics, and linguistic difficulties. It is argued that qualitative research can be broadened to include both active and passive modes of data collection, based on the types of social situations being studied. Contrary to what we take for granted in sociological work, in the craft of sociology, "data" are never gathered, never collected; they are constructed by the researcher; they are never "given," existing in a meta-personal realm all their own. While the interpretation of participant-observation data must be exercised with caution, within some limits, field research of this type may represent a step forward in the scientific study of a hitherto uncharted territory, e.g., the expressive silence confronting the subjectivity, that underwrites the objectivity, of the researcher.

Prior to the analysis of data, the next chapter provides a historical sketch of religious orders of women, providing the context within which we may better understand their present dilemmas.

CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: TWO DIFFERENT PATHS

This chapter traces the historical development of two different types of female religious orders: apostolic and contemplative. This requires a discussion of the organizational development of the Church, including the distinction between secular clergy and religious orders, the gradual exclusion of women from positions of authority, the rejection or incorporation and supervision of semi-autonomous religious orders (often a process of annexation and officialization), the challenge of Protestantism, and attempts to control the American Catholic Church, highlighting the continual regulation and supervision of female religious communities. The history of religious orders of women is traced here from the early days of Christianity, through the emergence of the monastic tradition, to the rise of the Mendicant Orders during the Middle Ages, to the eventual acceptance of apostolic orders which had developed in the 19th century, setting the stage for more recent developments that have shaped the two major traditions for religious orders of women since Vatican II.

Religious Orders

Since the days of early Christianity women have been

drawn to the religious life, choosing from one of two alternatives: either to serve society by doing good works in the outside world or to live the contemplative life of prayer and penance. It is the dichotomy between these two extremes that has always created, and continues to create, controversy surrounding religious communities of women to this day. The distinction between active (or apostolic) and contemplative orders is relevant both in a historical as well as a contemporary context. Along with their differences, similarities in their goals and lifestyles have been shaped historically.

For males the official or "secular" clergy represents the formal hierarchy of the Catholic Church, from priests to bishops to the Pope. Religious orders are communities for both males and females which have internal hierarchies and their leadership reports directly to the Pope; these orders are generally either apostolic (working in the world) or monastic. Priests may be either "secular," (that is, members of the official clergy) or "religious" (that is, members of specific religious orders, such as the Franciscans, Jesuits, etc.) and have the same sacerdotal powers -- that is, they are ordained and may administer the sacraments. Females have never been considered part of the formal Church hierarchy nor been ordained as ministers, but similar to male religious, they can be classified as either members of apostolic, sometimes referred to as "active," orders or contemplative

nuns living a cloistered existence. Both groups take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, have their own rules and constitutions, approved by Rome, and are recognized as bonafide religious communities by the Catholic Church. What follows is a historical sketch of religious orders of women with a view towards explaining the development of both monastic and apostolic traditions, especially with regard to women.

Widows and Virgins

From the beginning, female followers of Christ outnumbered men by two to one; by 50AD in Rome most Christians were women. After Christ's death many groups went out into the desert to live in communities, while others used their homes as meeting places where widows and unmarried girls would gather together for prayer. Often churches were built on these holy sites and many women were martyred. Women also lived in the catacombs and were responsible for converts. Archeological discoveries of art from the first century A.D. depicted women using the gestures of liturgical leadership; for example, a cave drawing of seven women celebrating the Eucharist (Demers, 1985) -- while men were shown as well but in a later period. The writings of the Gnostics also indicate such ideas as evidence of spiritual maturity for membership, de-emphasis on hierarchy, and strict equality for men and women in power positions (Pagels, 1979:42). Ecclesiastical records in the West show a pattern of

evolution from the deaconate of women as an instituted ministry -- that is, as formally recognized and ordained clergy -- to a ministry of service; that is, the rise of religious orders (Henning, 1974:279).

Widows and virgins were recognized as special groups at that time. Widows constituted a special category of women not under the jurisdiction of husbands in a heavily patriarchal age, where land ownership and inheritance were a major determinant of wealth, while "virgin" meant an unmarried woman, with a connotation of purity and honorableness. Both were presumed to live a life of celibacy, a state of chastity and purity. By the second century, virgins often lived in communities of prayer and meditation, while widows engaged in active work for the Church (Ebaugh, 1993:11). The writings of St. Paul make reference to these groups as having a special place in the Church (cf., for example, Corinthians 7:34-36 on virgins and 7:39-40 on widows; Timothy 5:3-16). Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a convert and one of the great scholars of Christian theology, made reference to the role of celibacy and widowhood in his letters to nuns and widows. Letters to the Nuns of Hippo, regarded as the source of the Augustinian Rule, include the following passage:

So often I find consolation in the midst of all the evils that abound everywhere in this world by thinking of your large community, your chaste love and holy way of life, and the abundant grace of God that has even given you, not only to renounce carnal wedlock, but even to choose to be a community dwelling with one accord under the same roof, that you may have one soul and one heart in God.

(Augustine in Leinenweber, 1992:202).

Augustine also wrote the following in a letter to Anicia Faltonia Proba, a wealthy widow who established a community of religious women in Carthage:

The destitution and desolation that widows experience make them especially apt for this kind of work (Augustine in Leinenweber, 1992:181).

Celibacy and piety came to be linked for both males and females and served as a foundation that influenced Christian notions of the ideal for religious life. The married state (referred to above by Augustine as "carnal wedlock") came to be seen as something less than the celibate state. As recently as 1956, Fulton Sheen wrote the following:

Virginity is the mountain peak of love as marriage is its hill (Sheen, 1956:141).

Despite official recognition of the sanctity of both widowhood and virginity, with the growth of the institutionalized Church, it became clear that the formal hierarchy would be exclusively male. While the Apostolic Constitutions and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. described a ritual of ordination for deaconesses, the synods and councils between the fourth and sixth centuries repeatedly denounce the diaconate for women. Various sources from the councils, early documents, and Church teachings show a solid basis for denial of women as ministers (Henning, 1974:279), yet they played a significant role in the spread of early Christianity.

Monasticism

Persecution of the early Christians made necessary a covert style of worship, but also served to spread the faith, providing the Church with its saints and martyrs. Although Christianity became preeminent by the 4th century, the tradition of the holy aesthetic continued; that is, the holy hermit who escaped the world to live a life of piety and seclusion, rejecting worldly pursuits; in effect, another type of martyrdom. One of these was St. Anthony, believed to have lived between 250 and 350 A.D., who was admired and imitated by others (Hastings, 1971:28). Another was Benedict (480-547) who founded his monastery at Monte Casino in 529 in order to train others who emulated his spiritual way of life. The Benedictine Rule became the standard model for religious orders in the West (Ebaugh, 1993:13; Fry, 1982:11; Hastings, 1971:28). The Benedictine Rule was not based on rejection or fear of life but emphasized Christian principles for living and working together as a community.

Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love" (St. Benedict, in Fry, (ed) 1982:18-19).

The code as set forth by Benedict had a familial tone, advocating correctional measures aimed at the healing of the person, with an emphasis on the love that could arise as a result of people living in community.

Others followed by forming similar communities, guided by abbots and abbesses, often chosen by the monks themselves. The age of western monasticism saw a growth in intellectual thought and monasteries became literary centers, but their emphases were mainly theological and historical and their purpose was more spiritual than intellectual (Haskins, 1927; 1976:44). On the other hand, monasteries were not immune from the conflicts that arose between Church and state at this time.

During the Middle Ages the Church, including its monasteries, was dependent on secular monarchs and nobles who controlled appointments at all levels. The problem of simony -- that is, the buying and selling of Church offices, as well as lay investiture -- the investing of the upper clergy by kings and other lords -- met with strong reaction from the Papacy. During the 11th century a series of papal decrees attempted to establish the autonomy of the Church and to enforce clerical separation from the laity (Cohn, 1970:38). Yet even those groups who began in the ascetic tradition, rejecting wealth and world, eventually accumulated property, had political ambitions, and demonstrated sexual laxity (Cohn, 1970:37). With regard to female communities, many of the great monasteries had been open to only aristocratic women. Both England and France experienced a period of monastic expansion between 1100 and 1200, followed by severe decline (Elkins, 1988). After the Norman Invasion, many

Anglo Saxon noble ladies fled to convents and many monasteries were founded by lay people. The powerful abbesses of the Anglo-Saxon period disappeared and many of low birth found they could easily enter religious life. Some women were forced into convents because they were misfits or their parents could not provide for them (Hastings, 1971:126). A variety of living arrangements and new orders were formed, leading to a certain amount of scattered and localized authority. In addition to problems with the secular clergy, the period that followed reflected twofold concerns of the Church: first, to regulate and enforce rules for existing religious orders; and secondly, to curb the emergence of heretical groups that arose during the Middle Ages.

In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council called by Pope Innocent III, required all new organizations to affiliate with existing ones to centralize rules and authority. With respect to female orders, these would now be subject to male supervision, regulation, and enclosure (Elkins, 1988). The rule of enclosure (also referred to as cloister) prohibited nuns from leaving the monastery and restricted outsiders from entering. In the Middle Ages the word "clausura," (derived from the word "claustrum, meaning "closed up") entered the vocabulary. Clausura designated the material obstacles marking off the bounds of property, the space reserved for those who enter or live there, and the body of ecclesiastical laws relative

to both. "Active cloister" refers to proscriptions against leaving the monastery, while "passive cloister" refers to restrictions on strangers coming into the community (Schulenburg, 1984:51-52). Although Chapter 66 of the Benedictine Rule guards against monks going outside, there was unequal emphasis on this policy for nuns. The monastic tradition, building upon the values of celibacy and flight from the world, had special implications for women, who were considered subordinate members of the Church. Females not only required extra protection from the outside world, but were also perceived as a threat to male celibacy. The Investiture Controversy tended to exclude women from the life of the Church by identifying them with earthly corruption, clerical concubinage, and moral laxity. While the physical defense and autonomy of female orders were legitimate rationales for enclosure, controlling female sexuality became the dominant concern of the 11th and 12th century reformers and strict enclosure came to be viewed as the only legitimate way for monastic women to lead exemplary lives (Schulenburg, 1984:78-79). This meant that nuns would have less autonomy and greater dependence upon men; that is, while abbots would be in charge of monks, bishops would be in charge of abbesses (Schulenburg, 1984:59). The problem of controlling existing religious orders, with special restrictions on women's communities, would continue, along with the additional concern of heresy.

The Friars

Monks, although the label appears to have been masculinized, were initially both male and female. They had served society with their prayers and cared for the sick and needy, but not necessarily the spiritual lives of the laity, since that was the responsibility of the secular clergy (Cohn, 1970:37). In addition, the laxities that had come to characterize both monks and clergy left a spiritual void in the Catholic population. As a result, a hunger for evangelism arose, whereby the gospel would be preached simply by those living in poverty as Christ did, in a way that appealed to the masses; but the tradition of mystical anarchism and the revolutionary messianic spirit which had characterized early Christianity would now be viewed differently by the formal, established Church. Interpretations of the kingdom of God shifted from the idea of a kingdom on earth to that of a spiritual kingdom, as exemplified by Augustine's City of God in the 5th century (Cohn, 1970:30). Messianic movements would now be looked upon with disfavor. Yet the emotional needs of the poor and oppressed brought on by overpopulation and social change left the people yearning for holy, apostolic men.

The emergence of what is known as the Mendicant Orders in the 13th century filled this void and afforded the Church an opportunity to realize the ideal of primitive Christianity within the framework of the institutionalized Church. The word "mendicant" means

beggar and is derived from the Latin, "mendicare" - to beg. Many preachers had large followings and some were deemed heretics by the formal Church, while others had full permission, such as Robert of Arbrissel and St. Norbert of Xanten (Cohn, 1970:40). The Orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic were modeled on a way of life that combined monastic existence with outside religious activity, owning neither personal nor community property. The Dominicans in particular were formed to combat heresy. Sometimes referred to as Friars, these groups were primarily male but female communities referred to as "Second Orders" were founded which shared the same values but lived a cloistered life and were forbidden to live in poverty or to preach or beg for alms, as these activities were deemed inappropriate for women. Third Orders lived a similar rule but lived a secular life, taking private vows (Ebaugh, 1993:15).

During this period the Mendicants had their counterparts in the Beghards and Beguines, groups which emerged during the 13th century until the end of the Middle Ages. Beghards were male groups who lived by alms, itinerant preachers with contempt for monks and the clergy. Some were literate and articulate, often appealing to women, particularly widows, sometimes those from the upper strata, such as the daughters of successful merchants. The numbers of women exceeded possible husbands due to wars and feuds, as well as celibacy of a

large percentage of the male population. Women of the aristocracy could become nuns but there was no role for other widows and spinsters (Cohn, 1970:160). The Beguines were women of the towns who were not official religious communities, but often lived together as such, sometimes adopting religious dress as well. As an alternative to marriage, upon which aristocratic women may have to give up their property to their husbands, those who chose not to enter traditional convents could affiliate with groups such as the Beguines. Both Beghards and Beguines came under attack by the official Church and were condemned in 1259 at the Council of the See of Mainz and again in 1310 (Cohn, 1970:161).

With regard to existing orders of women, in 1298 Pope Boniface VIII issued a Papal Bull demanding the principle of enclosure for all religious women, setting the standard for the next seven centuries (Ebaugh, 1993:14; Ewens, 1978:17). Along the same lines, the Ecumenical Council called by Clement V at Vienne on the Rhone in 1311-12 resulted in the Bull Ad Nostrum, which called upon bishops to examine the lives of Beghards and Beguines and to proceed against those with unorthodox views. The Bull de quibusdam called for all Beguines to live in communities under proper ecclesiastical supervision (Cohn, 1970:164). By the first half of the 14th century, most Beguines were affiliated with the Franciscan or Dominican Third Orders (Cohn, 1970:161).

Many other quasi-religious groups surfaced during the history of the Middle Ages, some being incorporated into the official Church. Yet even the Franciscans had their share of problems with the issue of poverty. Even before the death of St. Francis, two factions formed -- the spiritual and the conventional Franciscans -- the former wishing to follow the example of St. Francis by maintaining strict poverty and the latter believing that absolute poverty was impractical. This was eventually resolved by the conventional Franciscans winning out and the spirituals being condemned by the Church as heretics (Hastings, 1971:128).

Conflicts during the Middle Ages were repeatedly met with attempts at weeding out heretics, incorporating fringe groups, and tightening internal discipline, but the Church had other enemies. The Black Plague of the mid-14th century took the lives of many religious, and the Renaissance and Reformation challenged the legitimacy of both monastic and mendicant religious traditions (Ebaugh, 1993:16).

Apostolic Orders

The Protestant Reformation broke down the medieval distinction between clergy and laity, leading to the steady decline of traditional clerical privileges. The "priesthood of all believers" was a philosophy that enhanced secular life and vocations; that is, it served to sanctify the laity and secularize the clergy (Ozment,

1975:84). Along with rejection of the priesthood as a sanctified state, religious orders came under attack, including both monasticism and mendicancy. The vows of the cloister were addressed and refuted; for example, Andreas Karlstadt, author of the first Protestant tract against monastic vows wrote that "celibacy destroyed boys" (cited in Ozment, 1975:88). The written description of the decision of the Prior and members of St. Anne's convent in Augsburg to laicize themselves includes a vow-by-vow rejection of the cloistered way of life. Poverty meant to live off the sweat of others; contemplation was equated with idleness; obedience was faulty when pledged to one person rather than to the worldly government and to God's hierarchies of obedience as cited in Romans 13 -- obedience of wife to husband; children to parents, subjects to lords; and enforced chastity was unjust and unnatural except for those to whom God had granted this special gift (Ozment, 1975:89). Eberlin, an ex-Franciscan, wrote four pamphlets criticizing the monastic life and presenting other reform proposals, including a moratorium on mendicants in order that these groups would die out (Ozment, 1975:92-93). With regard to women, he wrote the following:

It is certainly a thing to pity that nunneries are so afflicted with unreasonable statutes made by foolish, ignorant, and inexperienced monks. The poor girls are forced to work as long as the boys or longer at singing, fasting, reading, meditating, and like pitiable things. Nuns must fast often while monks eat boiled or fried meat, which the nuns must prepare but cannot enjoy. Cloistered women are forbidden

even to see their parents, while monks may pursue their every interest (Eberlin in Ozment, 1975:93).

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw a flourishing of new humanism, including new roles for women. Nuns had been the only visible official role for women in the traditional Church, replaced by the pastor's wife in Protestantism (Douglass, 1974:306). Protestant doctrines changed the image and role of women in new directions towards personal freedom and responsibility. Sister Jeanne DeJussie of the Order of St. Claire chronicled the years 1526-35 in a book on Calvinism in which much was written about women. She describes the sisters leaving the city of Geneva which was hostile to them and the marriage of many monks and priests. She also discusses antagonisms between Protestant women and nuns, one of these a former abbess who returned after her marriage and tried to persuade others to follow (Douglass, 1974:312). Her account is evidence that Protestant teachings in praise of marriage were important to the new faith and a radical departure from tradition; she also makes clear that although Protestant women spoke of "freedom" for the nuns from the cloister, they were advocating a new type of constraint in marriage (Douglass, 1974:313-314). Douglass points out that the patriarchal structures of the day upholding the role of the married woman were biblically sanctioned, just as they had been for nuns.

In response to the new ideas of Protestantism and threats to the papacy, the Jesuits were founded in 1540

with the official role of defenders of the Pope. Jesuit philosophy represented a turning point in the philosophy of the religious life. Education became a primary goal, along with a militant or defensive stance as opposed to the former emphasis on love and community. Jesuits were highly educated and involved in social and political issues. Female orders founded during this period, such as the Ursulines in France, also had more pragmatic goals; that is, to meet the social needs of Catholics during the Counter-Reformation. This type of work required a more active role in the outside world, yet female communities were forced back into the cloister. The Council of Trent, conducted from 1545 to 1563, made two important points with regard to female religious orders. First, it reiterated cloistral regulations, and secondly, stated that no forced entry of females was permissible. This represented a series of attempts in the form of Papal legislation to curb abuses caused by unwilling nuns and the economic arrangements of the upper classes; for example, women were brought to convents because they could not provide for themselves or because their families wished to prevent them from claiming inheritance (Ewens, 1978:19-21). Within three decades after the Council of Trent three Papal bulls were issued reemphasizing cloistral regulations (Ewens, 1978:18). Because of the insistence on these regulations as the only bona fide form of religious life sanctioned by the official Church, some

orders were never recognized until the 20th century (Ebaugh, 1993:17). Others continued to exist without this formal recognition. The Daughters of Charity, founded in 1633, were the first uncloistered religious order to be recognized. They worked as nurses, did not take solemn vows, and were given only grudging acceptance by popes (Weaver, 1985:101-102). In addition, another more subtle change had taken place as a result of this era of defensive Catholicism, exemplified by Ignatius Lloyola, founder of the Jesuits. There appeared to be a shift from the collegial/communal atmosphere of the monastic community to one where hierarchy was emphasized. This shift was evident in both male and female orders. Perhaps this was deemed necessary in that by virtue of their work, members would have more contact with the outside world, requiring strict supervision by their superiors.

By the 18th century, the rationality of the Enlightenment -- that is, new ideas regarding the comprehension and control of the universe by means of reason and empirical research -- had threatened beliefs in traditional authority. The Jesuits were suppressed in 1773 and many other religious orders died out, either through lack of membership or denial of formal recognition by the Church.

The 19th Century: Vatican I

The nineteenth century saw three major trends: increasing threats to the legitimacy of the Papacy, the

foundation of many new religious orders in Europe, and the settlement in America of large numbers of Catholics. During this period approximately 600 new religious orders were founded with a highly apostolic focus in response to the growth of new institutions -- schools, hospitals, and orphanages (Ebaugh, 1993:17).

Once again this meant that female religious would have active missions in the world. One decision from Rome issued in 1803 held that simple vows, rather than solemn vows could be taken by sisters in apostolic orders -- this meant that their vows would not be permanent but taken annually. Yet various papal decrees upholding the cloistered lifestyle continued to be issued, several of these just prior to and following the First Vatican Council, convened in 1869, in response to the broader problem of encroaching rationalism and secularization of the 19th century, as well as the expanding Church in America.

Since the French Revolution of 1789, the Church had been at odds with some of the political goals and intellectual ideas of the time. Secularization, nationalism, and empiricism threatened the tradition and authority of the Papacy and the Church. At this time the Vatican was struggling with Italian nationals for control of the city of Rome. In 1864 Pius IX issued his "Syllabus of Errors," refusing to ally with "progress, liberalism, and modern civilization" (Pope, 1985:81). In response to

these issues, the First Vatican Council gathered in Rome in December, 1869, to strongly reinforce papal primacy and infallibility (Walsh, 1991:18-19). Threats from within were exacerbated by the immigration of many Catholics to America and the concern about ensuring the loyalty of American clergy. During this period the Vatican selected American bishops based on their adherence to Rome (Greeley, 1977:158-59).

Vatican I renewed the emphasis on tradition over scripture, bureacratic centrism, distrust of science and free scholarship, and a defensive siege mentality (Seidler and Meyer, 1989:17). The affective, rather than rational or ethical, aspects of the faith were renewed, as well as the supreme authority of Rome in all religious matters. These edicts promoted a firm conservatism and universal conformity in beliefs and practices, including those of religious orders.

The Apostolicae Sedes of 1869 issued by Pius IX reinforced enclosure for those women taking solemn vows (Ewens, 1978:203). It is worth noting that in September, 1864, a decree was issued stating that most nuns in the United States should take only simple vows; however, aspects of enclosure -- that is, cloistral regulations -- would still be a necessary part of religious life in order for it to be deemed legitimate (Ewens, 1978:204).

The Third Plenary Council in Baltimore in 1884 established normal schools to train nuns as teachers,

allowed simple vows under the jurisdiction of local bishops, and established a uniform procedure for the writing of constitutions to be sent to Rome for approval (Ewens, 1978:253). Finally, in 1900 the Bull Conditae a Christo recognized sisters with simple vows as bona fide religious (Ewens, 1978:255). However, the "partial cloister" would be retained. In 1917 canon law was codified for the first time in 600 years and specific cloistral regulations would be outlined in detail. Every five years congregations would submit directly to Rome detailed questionnaires measuring the degree to which they were following canon law. (Ewens, 1979:273). This time period coincided with large numbers of religious coming to America to serve the needs of the new immigrant population, particularly in the field of education, giving rise to the age of the teaching orders.

Although the cloistral regulations of 1917 provided uniformity for religious in customs and lifestyles, it also left open questions for American sisters who would be working in mission territory. The continued rigidity, as well as the difficulties of balancing cloistered and apostolic lifestyles, followed religious orders of women to America.

Religious Orders of Women in America

Although sisters were working in the American territories before 1790, the first permanent settlement of sisters was in New Orleans when nine French Ursulines

arrived in 1727 to take charge of a hospital under contract with the Company of India (Ewens, 1978:22).

America was regarded as mission territory. The histories of many orders contain evidence of anti-Catholic sentiment, the difficulties of pioneer existence, conflicts with bishops and native Americans, problems with observing the strict rules of their constitutions, and deplorable living conditions. These issues are highlighted in the histories of both case study orders which are summarized in the following chapter. Histories of many orders show active discrimination against them, but the problem was particularly acute in New England where the Know-Nothing Party spread anti-Catholic propaganda. The histories of both orders in this study indicate problems of discrimination in the early years of their foundations in the northeast. Their histories are linked in that they eventually had foundations in the same city and despite their different missions were supportive of each other in those pioneering days of the American Church in the late 19th century.

The Great Repression: 1900-1950

During the first half of this century religious orders flourished and gained the respect of Protestants and Catholics, as well as the educational community. Despite the success of the sisters in their new environment, particularly in education, their lifestyles followed the rules of the cloister laid down centuries

before. Dress, living arrangements, social relationships, and exposure to the outside world were strictly regulated for both apostolic and contemplative communities.

Historical accounts from several different communities document the challenge for American sisters, particularly those in active orders, to carry out their missions despite the formal roles and rules which made them so much more difficult. These issues are further developed in later chapters in relation to the two orders being studied here.

By the 1950s vocations were flourishing, reaching their peak in 1965, but little had changed in their way of life. Because so many sisters were engaged in teaching, concern about the higher education and professionalization of nuns led to a series of mandates from the Vatican to improve the training of sisters in order to keep them on an equal footing with their secular counterparts. In addition, the Vatican asked the sisters to organize in order to accomplish this. The First General Congress of the States of Perfection, an international gathering of the heads of religious orders was convened by Pope Pius XII in 1950 (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:11). National associations were also recommended. Originally a temporary organization, the Conference of Major Superiors of Women of the USA (CMSW), today called the Leadership Conference of Women Religious of the USA (LCWR), became a permanent organization on November 24, 1956 (Quinonez and

Turner, 1992:16-17). The dialogue that had begun over the education of nuns soon expanded into a total re-evaluation of their work and lifestyles, consistent with other issues of change faced by the Church in the early part of this century.

The Awakening: Vatican II

Despite the edicts of Vatican I which had promoted a firm conservatism and universal conformity in beliefs and practices, the forces of change continued to affect the Church, particularly in America. Increased communication and transportation, awareness of other religious ideas, the growth of social sciences, new theological insights and discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, medical advances, technology, issues of personal fulfillment and the rise of the feminist movement presented great challenges to the Church as an institution reliant on a pre-industrial, pre-modern authority structure. Key issues included questions of authority, freedom, liturgy, theology, and current social problems (Seidler and Meyer, 1989:164), all of which involved many movements and trends within the Church. By the 1960s, perhaps symbolized by the election of John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic President, the normalization of Catholics in America had allowed the Church to abandon its "siege mentality" and the accompanying defensiveness of an "out-group."

The Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965,

was the first Council to exclusively address pastoral matters. Called by Pope John XXIII, whose vision was to "open the window" (aggiornamento) of the Church to accommodate the needs of the modern world, the Second Vatican Council would begin to facilitate an enormous process of renewal. The documents of Vatican II are clear about this new philosophy but vague with regard to the new status of female religious. For example, while the Gaudium et Spes (1965) made clear the new role of the Church in the world: active and responsive, the Lumen Gentium (1964) was ambiguous in its statements with regard to religious orders of women. The Perfectae Caritatis (1965) called upon religious communities to be prompt in the re-evaluation and proposed changes within their communities, yet offered no specific guidelines for these changes, particularly for active orders.

With regard to religious orders of women in America, this meant substantial upheaval. Sisters were called upon by the Vatican to examine their rules and constitutions, to evaluate their work and lifestyles, and to come up with recommendations for change. This meant re-evaluating their goals and the means by which they should be accomplished, including the cloistered lifestyle. These changes eliminated many of the barriers between the nun and the world, changes that will be dealt with specifically in the next chapters describing the changing lifestyles of the two case study orders. Although change

was adopted by different orders at different rates and with some variations, it appears that today active religious orders again appear fairly homogeneous with regard to current lifestyles (Ebaugh, 1993:22). Contemplative orders would have retained more of the former cloistral regulations.

Ironically, the advanced education of sisters, democratic decision making, organization of sisters that allowed active collaboration between them, and the loss of some of the symbolic structures that had supported their status within the Church, have contributed to a steady decline in their numbers. According to Ebaugh (1993), two key factors have led to the demise of religious orders that differentiates current problems from those in the past: 1) the loss of the cloister as an internal structure, and 2) increased opportunities for women in the labor force (Ebaugh, 1993:22). To this could be added the third factor of greater government expansion into the areas of education, health care, and social service, encroaching on the primary roles fulfilled by working nuns, and the fourth factor of the feminist movement which has supported the independence of women as a cultural value.

Contemporary Religious Orders

Today religious orders of women in the United States continue to decline. While it is generally believed that the "mass exodus" experienced in the thirty years since

Vatican II, is over, American orders have suffered serious blows to their viability. Since 1960, 44 percent of the total membership in the U.S. has been lost. (Membership in 1960 was 168,527 and is 94,022 in 1993 as documented in the Roman Catholic Directories for those years.) American convents have more women over 90 than under 30. Of the approximately 600 religious female communities in the United States 47 percent have fewer than 100 members each (Woodward, 1990:50) and the average age of women in religious communities is estimated at 65 (McClory, 1987:26) and rapidly approaching 70 (Blake, 1986:185).

Today active sisters continue to serve as administrators and educators, but their jobs have shifted into other areas, such as religious instruction, parish administration, social services, and more specialized health-related fields. The process of change mandated by the Vatican opened up a dialogue between the sisters and the hierarchy which often caused serious conflict. The Americanization, politicization, and feminization of American nuns have created an identity crisis for those who remain in religious orders. There is more dependency upon Lay Associate programs consisting of members who do not live in communities nor take formal vows. Many have left their communities and formed other groups who do not have formal status within the Church.

Although much of the controversy surrounding religious orders of women today centers around those in active

orders, the cloister has also been affected by changes since Vatican II. Contemplative nuns have always constituted a small portion of female religious in the United States. (Estimates range from 4 percent to 10 percent of the total membership.) They, too, have experienced a decline in numbers since Vatican II. Yet there are indications that monasticism in America is on the rise and as the twentieth century comes to a close, both monastic and apostolic traditions survive, however tenuously. In what form -- that is, in what combination of these two traditions -- the religious life may survive in the United States is the general question being addressed in this dissertation.

This chapter has summarized the historical pattern of Church supervision and regulation of female orders of women and the development of the apostolic and contemplative traditions over time. This has been done in the context of the overarching concerns of the Church through different time periods, including the incorporation or rejection of semi-autonomous religious communities, responding to the threats of Protestantism, attempts to control the American Catholic Church, the consistent exclusion of women from positions of authority, and the more current controversies resulting from the mandates of Vatican II, which point to a continuation of the Church's struggle to maintain itself as a viable

institution into the 21st century.

With some knowledge of the origin and history of religious orders of women, we turn now to a discussion of two contemporary American communities, each representing the surviving traditions of female religious orders: apostolic and contemplative. The following chapters discuss the history, organizational structure, lifestyles, and demographics of each of the two case study orders, highlighting the changes that have taken place since Vatican II. We begin with the apostolic order which will be referred to here as the Sisters of Compassion.

CHAPTER V

THE APOSTOLIC ORDER: THE SISTERS OF COMPASSION

In this chapter, I discuss the background, organizational structure, work, lifestyle, and demographics of one active (also referred to as "apostolic") order with which I had the most contact during this fieldwork. This chapter is based on interviews with 23 of the sisters, informal interactions with several others, writings published by the order, as well as other archival materials provided. The apostolic order will be referred to here as the Sisters of Compassion. To my knowledge there is no such Catholic religious order of that name and in order to protect anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout for names of persons. No direct reference is made to archival or other identifying literature which has been coded throughout and is listed in Appendix B.

Apostolic orders were formally recognized by the Catholic Church in 1900; these sisters had traditionally lived a semi-cloistered lifestyle, while also working in the outside world, primarily as teachers and nurses. The Sisters of Compassion provide a case study that may reflect the experience of other active orders in the United States. This chapter provides a historical sketch

of the order, its interactions with the hierarchy, and the ways in which their lifestyle and demograpahics have been altered since Vatican II. It appears that the Sisters of Compassion may be moving back towards their origins in that they are beginning to resemble those who founded their order -- a group of 19th-century women involved in social welfare causes, who, as with many such groups at that time, did not have formal status as a Catholic religious order.

Historical Background

The Sisters of Compassion was founded in Ireland in 1831 by a wealthy hieress who devoted her life to the care of the sick and poor of the cities, particularly women and children. A 1709 Act of Parliament had proscribed Catholic schools, eliminating Catholic education for the Irish. A Catholic by birth but raised by a Protestant family after the death of her parents, Mary McCarthy set out to establish a social service center in Dublin and a free school for the poor. She was especially interested in sheltering young, unemployed girls and believed that educating women was the only way to improve society. The foundress had begun her work in 1828 when she purchased a permanent residence intending to recruit a corps of social workers, but had no intention of founding a religious order.

Mary's institute was granted formal approval by the local archbishop, but due to hostility from both secular

and clerical factions, he gave her the ultimatum of founding a religious order or withdrawing from her apostolate. Her main objection to religious community was that its cloistered or semi-cloistered form would not be conducive to the work she had in mind. At that time, other religious orders of women had been forced into enclosure, as women living in community without becoming full fledged religious was deemed unacceptable. This resistance is referred to in an entry in an archival manuscript dated 1830, with regard to the opinion of one cleric.

This gentleman had no great idea that the unlearned sex could do anything but mischief by trying to assist the clergy. Furthermore, he was prejudiced against the Foundress whom he considered as "parvenue." His opinions, perhaps, influenced the curates by whom he was greatly loved; for certainly they did not affect to be glad of the establishment either as a secular or religious institute (Archival Materials SC1:34).

As its numbers increased, the group adopted uniformity of dress, shared a common schedule, designated a separate section of the house for spiritual exercises, and even referred to themselves as sisters; but there was much criticism of these "new nuns" who were not considered legitimate religious. A letter from one priest berated them for the "impropriety of a woman encroaching on such masculine prerogatives as business, finance, philanthropy and religious foundations" (Archival Materials SC1:129). After threats from the archbishop that her institute would be taken over, Mary began to investigate the rules of

different congregations to find an appropriate one that suited her mission. She decided on the Rule of St. Augustine and on simple vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

In 1831, Papal confirmation was received, after which a formal constitution was submitted and finally ratified by Pope Gregory XVI on June 6, 1841. The foundress was obligated to attend the novitiate or formal training at another congregation, enduring 15 months of severity that took its toll on her health. It had taken 10 years for formal acceptance of the rule, but Mary's difficulties did not stop here. Histories of the order indicate financial problems, as well as continued clashes with the formal hierarchy. The following excerpt from one of her letters written in January, 1838, indicates elements of both, as well as a sense of humor:

I am hiding from some law person who wants to serve a paper on me. I am afraid to remain five minutes in the small parlour. This has caused more laughing than crying...for every man is suspected of being the process man. They make a demand of four hundred and fifty pounds...Now you have the double Cross: the Cross of the diocese. Outside of it (the diocese) all is consoling and animating, thanks be to God (Archival Materials SC1:67).

Before Mary's death in 1841, twelve foundations were established in Ireland and two in England, the latter being the first convents built in England after the Protestant Reformation. (In 1829 the Zest Acts finally granted equality to Catholics.)

In 1843 an American bishop of Irish descent who was familiar with the work of the sisters (since he had been asked to translate some of their proposed Rule from English into Italian) returned to Ireland to try to recruit sisters to cater to the needs of Irish immigrants in his new diocese in America. In 1846 seven sisters, accompanied by a newly appointed Mother Superior, traveled to the United States to establish the first American congregation on the East Coast. According to the archives of the congregation, the American foundress personally established more convents, schools, hospitals, and institutes of social welfare than any other religious leader in the Western world. The sisters traveled in twos, threes, and fours to establish congregations throughout the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic states, the Midwest to the West Coast, always at the urgency of bishops.

Biographies of the American foundress indicate that the spirit of the Order was embodied in her and that she was particularly suited for a mission in America because her leadership style combined a "personal spirituality with a pioneering spirit" (Archival Material SC2:148-49). Similar to the experience of the Irish foundress, Mother Dolan was to meet with severe difficulties on her mission in America, including clerical skepticism. One bishop is said to have had reservations about her as a Superior and wrote that "while I would have preferred a greater submissiveness in her character, I am thoroughly conscious

of her worth" (Archival Materials SC2:214). Another bishop was said to indicate that she "did not accept ecclesiastical authority completely." (Archival Material SC2:215). In his biennial reports to the Propaganda Fide in Rome, the bishop of the American diocese indicated preference for another Superior who was more "submissive" (Archival Materials SC2:215). Yet it would seem that the mission of the sisters in America, particularly in the northern New England states, would require a person of great courage and initiative. One of her biographies mentions Mother Dolan's great ability to adapt certain customs of her Order to the American environment (Archival Materials SC3:479). Here she is said to have incurred resistance from some sisters as well as pastors and bishops.

The implementation of the goals of the Sisters of Compassion -- goals approved by the official hierarchy -- was often hindered by resistance from them, not to mention obstacles from the outside environment. Catholic immigrants were not welcome in the colonies, particularly in New England, where the Know-Nothing Party was actively campaigning against them. The State Constitution of 1783 (the state in which the diocese under study is located) denied representation of Catholics in the Senate and by July, 1849, this was the only state in the union in which Catholics could not hold office (Archival Materials SC3:264)). In some cases sisters were literally smuggled

then into New England towns (often wearing secular dress to disguise themselves), convents were burned, and sisters were harassed on the streets. In 1835, the convent of the Ursuline Sisters was destroyed in Charlestown, Massachusetts, a priest was tarred and feathered in Portland, Maine, and on July 3, 1854, St. Anne's Church in Manchester, New Hampshire was attacked by an angry mob. Rioters attacked Irish Catholics and drove them from their homes, destroyed furniture and shattered Church windows (Archival Materials SC3:272). In the 1850s Yale and Harvard college students participated in nativist activities in New Haven and Boston; for example, during recreation periods they broke the windows of Catholic homes, churches, and convents, and insulted sisters and priests on the streets (Ewens, 1978:152).

This activity may have been exacerbated by the bizarre image of the nun carried over from European literature. The wayward nun was a popular literary theme in medieval Europe (cf. Daichman, 1986), a theme also of Diderot's (1974) classic eighteenth century portrait of the "unwilling nun" and the dangers of convent life. Lectures by escaped nuns, such as Maria Monk, captured the public imagination (Ewens, 1978:155-56) and because of their strange dress and customs, nuns were associated with bizarre foreign cultures. This image, coupled with generalized anti-Catholic sentiment, prevented their early acceptance in America, particularly in New England. A

1903 issue of the New York Sun included an article on the American foundress, noting that "the difficulties of winning a way in the new unsettled West were little in comparison with those breaking a path into Puritan New England" (Archival Materials SC3:477).

The American foundress is described as being far more outgoing than the Irish foundress, with a more inward response to reality, enigmatic in relations with others, exuding a passionate love, but also as one whose responses were not always understood. Her biographers describe her as "queenly" and "aristocratic in bearing" which appeared haughty to some; however, she also demonstrated "humor, charm, a sharp sense of the ridiculous, and a sense of trust that often boomeranged" (Archival Materials SC3:470). While the Irish foundress was described as gentle and docile, her American counterpart was characterized as assertive (Archival Materials SC3:478). When she decided to centralize the novitiate (training school) and the governance of the order, resistance from the bishop brought her own responses in letters and statements which expressed amusement rather than anger (Archival Materials SC2:290-91).

Despite these difficulties, the Sisters of Compassion eventually won the support of both Protestants and Catholics. They served both sides during the Civil War, set up mission schools for native Americans, and established schools and hospitals wherever they founded

new congregations. With the influx of Catholic immigrants during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, sisters served as teachers and nurses. As with other active communities, the order continued to flourish, particularly in the field of education, until the mid-1960s when vocations had reached their peak and the forces of change had begun.

Work Tasks

As with most orders during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, education of the Catholic population was a primary goal. By 1920, the vast majority of the Sisters of Compassion were involved in teaching; in fact, they were largely responsible for secondary education on the East Coast, especially for women. (No independent secular college accepted women until Oberlin in Ohio in 1850, provided women do the wash, clean rooms, and serve the meals of male students. In 1896, Notre Dame of Maryland opened for women students but no male Catholic college would accept women until 1911 when Catholic University of America allowed them to take courses provided they were held off campus (Chittister, 1990:22).)

The sisters also worked as nurses and administrators but their occupational positions were decided for them, most often based on need. Several accounts from this sample corroborate the fact that this was the case. If you entered with a particular talent this might be taken into consideration, but for the most part the work was a

matter of need and obedience was expected. One woman recalled that she wanted to be a nurse but was sent to school for teaching. Another sister recalled that she wanted to work in the kitchen because she liked domestic work but was designated to be a teacher.

I didn't like school...just got by by the skin of my teeth. I wanted to enjoy life. When I got out of high school I felt I was not college material... my talents were working with my hands. I could sew and cook. They changed my mind for me (Field Notes 4:48, 10/19/92).

Before Vatican II, there was a type of caste system within convents whereby some were chosen to be "lay sisters" who did domestic work and others designated as "choir sisters" who were trained for specific occupations. The latter were then free to concentrate on their jobs and had no worries about domestic duties. Unlike secular women, the sisters had their laundry done, their meals prepared, and their convents cleaned for them. One nun explained that the "lay sisters" went back to the tradition of "ladies in waiting" who worked for individual nuns from titled families; that is, the royal abbesses of medieval times.

After the formation period sisters were placed into jobs, referred to as "missions." Because the Sisters of Compassion was primarily a teaching order, most could expect to be teachers; however, many of the sisters affirmed that there was little choice as to what grade levels, subjects, or locations where one would teach. Assignments (referred to as "nominations") were given year-to-year so that there was never a guarantee of

returning to a job after the first year. Several sisters described this process. Some met in a group and each sister would receive a piece of paper with her next assignment written on it. Sometimes lists were posted, and others mentioned that nominations were announced in a group. One sister described how she felt upon hearing that she was not going to return to a job she loved.

My heart was broken when I realized my job had been taken (Field Notes 1:4, 9/15/92).

Another nun had this to say:

On August 15 of each year you would be informed of your next assignment...in June you always cleaned out your room right down to the last paper clip on the chance that you would not be coming back (Field Notes 5:67, 1/19/93).

The sister quoted above recalled being assigned to a second grade classroom after having taught eighth grade, and feeling very unprepared. Another sister told her story:

Four of us were music teachers but they needed classroom teachers so two of us were taken. They made up their mind. I had to change my attitude... God gave me the discipline, the grace over the years (Field Notes 7:94, 3/12/93).

Yet another sister spoke of having to leave the classroom to take a job playing the organ in church as follows:

We got billy-do slips...they were obedience slips is what they were, saying "you are assigned to whatever for the school year." I was very young and I knew how to play the piano and God help your hide because they'd put you on the organ. It was my third year teaching and they assume you can do anything with music. I had never been on an organ bench. The tears flowed as soon as I read it but there were 7 of us in the house. I was younger and one 10 years ahead of me was assigned to church work so she would do this while I practiced the organ. They made you

stronger individuals (Field Notes 14:183, 8/4/93). Despite this lack of individual choice, the sisters were well educated in comparison to many lay women. Many nuns expressed the idea that a strong sense of community and spirituality gave them a sense of confidence that they could handle any job.

Before the 60s sisters attended summer school and workshops to prepare them for teaching. After Vatican II, sisters were required to attend universities for advanced degrees, in keeping with the demand for adequate credentials in education. Attention to individual talents and preferences was afforded as well. According to one sister:

We went from a schedule of prayer and a priority of education and hospitals to a freer expression of the person...what the person wants to do in ministry (Field Notes 3:37, 9/30/92).

Gradually, with the exodus of many women from religious life in the late 60s and early 70s, and the closing of many Catholic schools, sisters became more involved in other apostolates, particularly areas of social work, religious education, and health care. Vocation came to be defined in occupationally-based terms. Domestic tasks, once relegated to certain members, would now be shared collectively. This shift occurred by necessity as they no longer had the numbers required, nor the close-knit living arrangements in some cases, to designate in-house tasks.

Today the Sisters of Compassion sponsor 18 colleges and 238 health care facilities in 109 cities. In contrast

to the early part of the century when nuns were mostly involved with education on primary and secondary levels, today more are working in the fields of health care and social work, often within parishes. Today the sisters provide emergency shelters, food banks, and soup kitchens for the poor, provide financial support, technical assistance, and management for low-income housing, and support and assist those with special needs: battered women and children, pregnant teens, AIDS victims chemically dependent and prison populations. The following table shows the distribution of labor as of 1993:

TABLE V.1: Occupational Distribution of the Sisters of Compassion, 1993

Education (incl.rel)	40%
Health Care	21%
Social Work	14%
Parish Service	9%
Unit Admin.	4%
Housing	2%
Other	10%

(Pamphlet published by the Sisters of Compassion, SC5, 1993)

While many of the sisters are still engaged in education, a larger number have moved into many areas that reflect active participation in the solution of contemporary social problems. In addition, it is up to the sisters themselves to find work and to contribute financially to the community. They must apply and interview for positions both inside and outside of

Catholic institutions. Sisters also pay social security and have financial difficulties due to the shortage of younger sisters to support elderly members.

Work for monetary gain or as a source of pride is not conducive to the code of humility and service once required of the religious life. The view of work as paid labor contradicts the original meaning of their vocations. The sisters now refer to their work as "charism" which means the particular ideology that the work represents, as well as the specific goal of their order. Many made reference to the gospels as the source of their current work missions; yet there is some evidence that the sisters have been forced, out of economic necessity, to view occupations in a way very similar to that of the secular world -- in terms of professional credentials and market value. This may also cause differentiation of status within communities; for example, one older sister who supplements her income by babysitting, indicated her discomfort in discussing her job with other sisters who had professional jobs. This tendency to give caring work a price tag has affected sisters just as it has affected secular women. Yet many conveyed a sense of pride and happiness to be working in areas where they are making a difference and many are involved in political causes.

Organizational Structure

As with other orders before Vatican II, the Sisters of Compassion were governed by a group of representatives

called the General Chapter, elected by the membership. The Chapter then elected a central administration, including the Superior General and an advisory group, referred to as her Council. The Superior General, after consultation with the Council, appointed local superiors, administrators of the order's institutions, and those who would be responsible for training new sisters.

Local superiors were responsible for the administration of individual convents, for enforcing the observation of the constitution, rules, and customs of the order, and the assignment of duties and responsibilities among the membership. The internal hierarchy of the convent consisted of the Mother Superior, Mother Assistant, Mother Bursar, Mistress of Novices (the latter three together referred to as "The Discreets"), the professed sisters, ranked by virtue of year of entrance, novices (in training), and postulants (new recruits). Precedence did not hold once one left office and only the title of Mother was retained if one had been Mother Superior for 6 years. Age and rank were important demarcations within the community, but the office superseded individual persons. Titles were always used and it was their custom never to mention the surname of a sister to each other; that is, the title of "Sister" or "Mother" was always used. As mentioned, sisters entered as either "choir" sisters or "lay" sisters, the former to be educated and to hold jobs in the outside world and the

latter doing domestic work. The lay sister rarely left the walls of the convent. This differentiation, as well as age and office, constituted the internal hierarchy. Rank was reflected in their rituals; for example, when entering the chapel the lowest ranked entered first, with the exception of burial of a sister when, in honoring the dead, the order was reversed. In addition, choir sisters wore a train which was 13 inches longer than the rest of their habit to differentiate them from lay sisters. Choir sisters wore a cross representing Christ "outside," while lay sisters wore a crucifix on a Rosary representing Christ "inside" the Church. These customs, serving as demarcation lines and visible boundaries, upheld internal statuses and promoted a sense of mystery and awe regarding those in authority.

In 1965, in the wake of Vatican II, which called for renewal and re-evaluation of religious orders, the U.S. congregations formed a Federation to facilitate communication and goal-setting. This was true of most orders during this time. The Sisters of Compassion are also members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Outgrowths of the renewal process included committee work and meetings where information was shared by the whole community. This open exchange of information loosened the reigns of formal, traditional authority. On the other hand, the Sisters have had many clashes with the hierarchy with regard to specific changes, political

questions, and the position of women in the Church in general, a theme that will be readdressed in later chapters.

In 1992, after a ten-year long process required for Vatican approval, the Sisters of Compassion formed an Institute with one President. Today there are 25 regional communities in 45 states and an additional 300 members who work in Europe, Latin America, and South American countries. The new Institute has approximately 7000 members, representing a global community. Major Superiors are now referred to as "Presidents." An outside facilitator is often used to coordinate the whole election process. Sisters within their own regions are asked to submit "affirmations" or letters to individuals they feel would make good leaders. People either accept or reject their affirmations and those accepting write up their qualifications and ideas which are distributed to the membership. They may also give talks to groups outlining their positions. All sisters then vote for their regional President and council members. Presidents of all regions and their council members then meet and vote for the Major Superior or President of the entire Institute. Each Major Superior first receives input from their own communities (that is, a vote) as to their choice for President of the Institute. In addition, they have a large "associate" program consisting of lay people who engage in volunteer work with them, but do not have a vote.

In summary, while internal structures of authority have loosened, promoting a new sense of openness and sharing of information, the recent consolidation of regional communities into one Institute might be seen as an attempt to centralize authority and to recreate community -- that is, to regenerate feelings of solidarity and loyalty to the order, despite geographical separation.

Vows and Lifestyles

The Sisters took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and a pledge to serve the poor, ill, and uneducated of society. Poverty meant that all property was communally owned, including personal items used by the sisters. Chastity meant not only denial of sexual relations but also the devotion of all energies to their tasks and limited personal relationships among the members themselves. Obedience meant compliance with all rules, customs, and directives, under the direction of the Mother Superior, whose authority was absolute. The vows as interpreted before Vatican II were reflected in aspects of the semi-cloistered lifestyle. These and the way they have been altered since Vatican II are discussed below.

Exposure to the World: Sisters were expected to return to their convents after their work day was complete. There was little contact between the sisters and lay people, except in the direct completion of their work. During the training period or "novitiate," there was to be no contact

with family members. Sisters were to be present for meals and prayer services and permission was required for any deviation from this schedule. Lay sisters generally remained within the convent. Sisters were not allowed to watch television, read newspapers, or to discuss events taking place in the outside world. Appropriate topics for discussion at recreation were outlined in their rules and custom books. All incoming and outgoing mail was read and censored. Information from the outside was filtered through the Mother Superior, even information on what was going on in the families of particular sisters. Telephone calls were also restricted and even family emergencies relayed through the Mother Superior.

Since Vatican II the work nuns perform has taken them far from the cloister. Their new mission was to become actively engaged in work with people so that stringent time schedules within the convent could not be maintained. Administrative meetings, night work, and weekend conferences requiring travel interfered with communal activities. Higher education brought sisters into contact with the academic world and forced them to become better informed about current events and issues. Without a working knowledge of cultural change and social issues, sisters could not be expected to teach effectively. New jobs in social work have brought them into urban and rural poverty areas where physical and other types of labor are not conducive to even partially cloistered restrictions.

Many sisters have now become active in political causes and social justice issues.

Dress: Before Vatican II, sisters wore a traditional habit which covered everything but their face and hands. Habits differentiated the sisters by rank but the fully professed nun was clothed in yards of black that helped to obfuscate any vestige of former individual identity. The nun was identifiable to all outsiders by virtue of the habit which was perhaps the most powerful symbol of identity for her as well as for others. Set apart as a holy person, the nun had also hidden her sexuality, so that she was thought of not so much as a holy "woman" but as a person set apart from both gender and all other secular statuses. Some items, such as handkerchiefs, undershirts, shoes, and watches were male or imitated male styles (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:89). In addition, their religious names were often those of male saints.

After Vatican II, many orders began modifying the habit in the interests of comfort and to accommodate the sisters' new professional persona in the modern world. For the sisters studied here, gradually more options were introduced in order to allow those who chose to keep the traditional habit to do so and to allow others to dress in a more secular fashion, depending upon their work. Today many of these sisters do not wear a habit but there is a wide range of dress styles that resembles a continuum from traditional habit to secular dress that can be observed at

any gathering of the community. More traditional garb is worn by the elderly sisters. The loss of the habit as a powerful symbol of separateness forced sisters not only to reclaim their status as members of the "world" but as women, less differentiated from their secular counterparts.

Social Relations: Close relationships within the convent -- referred to as "particular friendships" (cf. "fraternalization" in the Coast Guard, a serious infraction) -- were discouraged. Emotional energy was to be focused on inner spiritual life and on the particular work being performed. Attachments to individuals would make the vow of obedience more difficult, as sisters were sent to various work assignments that meant physical relocation. Anonymity was encouraged and personal identity suppressed because it was thought to disrupt the uniformity and precedence of the group as superseding the individual. Celibacy might also be threatened by allowing emotional relationships to develop among individuals. Common use of property, denial of personal possessions, and lack of direct acclamations for individuals helped eliminate any sense of individual talents or personality. Sisters were explicitly forbidden to discuss among themselves aspects of their former selves, their families, or the histories of others among themselves. They were also encouraged to seek out only the Mother Superior to discuss any problems they might have had. This does not

mean that there was no social support among sisters; rather, that the acceptance of these norms by all members provided a sense of validation that sustained collective identity rather than individual personalities.

Once asked to change their relationship to the outside world, it would follow that the relationships of sisters to one another would also change. The mandate from Rome to re-evaluate their lifestyles, and further, to do so in a collaborative effort, opened the floodgates within and between orders. More educated sisters, with a new knowledge of sociology and psychology, began to change social relationships within the convent. Discussion groups and workshops brought individual problems out into the open; loosening of the old authority structures allowed sisters to participate in consensual decision-making and to let their feelings be known. Today sisters appear to work, pray, and play together, forming close relationships with each other as well as others in the outside world. Today personal bonds are considered another expression of their vow of celibacy - that is, to be open and loving to all (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:90).

Living Arrangements: Sisters were bound together by virtue of their communal existence. Typically, each order has a Motherhouse which is the central administrative arm of the order and a place for joint activities and rejuvenation for all members. Individual convents in other regional areas, often within different parishes,

housed several members of the order. The common rituals and activities in these convents sustained the daily lives of the sisters, providing them with the spiritual enrichment that was to guide their work. The decline of membership after Vatican II made it impossible for the order to maintain convents that housed few members. Many properties were sold and some nuns now live in groups of 3 or 4 in rented homes and in some cases singly in apartments, depending upon their specific job locations. The Motherhouse still serves as a central meeting place for the sisters, as well as an infirmary and nursing home for retired and ill sisters. While once separate buildings served as novitiates or schools for postulants, these are no longer necessary. "Inter-community" living is also a common arrangement, whereby sisters from different orders working within the same parishes or dioceses have joined together in convents. In essence, for many working nuns, the former sense of physical community experienced on a daily basis is no longer as it once was.

Demographics

Despite their success in new fields of endeavor and their newly centralized organization, the Sisters of Compassion are experiencing the same patterns of decline evident in other religious orders since Vatican II. This is the result of demographic changes that have occurred over the last 30 years. The decreasing numbers of

vocations and large numbers of defections taken together accounted for major losses in membership. Comprehensive data has been compiled as part of the National Sisters' Survey, sponsored by the Conference of Major Superiors of Women and conducted by Marie Augusta Neal, S.N.D. in 1966 with a follow up study done in 1982. From 1976 to 1980, 91 percent fewer recruits entered religious orders than in the period between 1958 and 1962 (Ebaugh, 1993:48-49). In addition, rates of defection increased steadily between 1950 and 1970, when numbers of women leaving reached its peak (Ebaugh, 1993:50). Similarly, the table below indicates the numbers of vowed members of this particular regional community of the Sisters of Compassion over time.

TABLE V.2: Membership of the Sisters of Compassion: 1950-1994

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Membership</u>
1950	398
1961	476
1965	510 (peak year)
1968	490
1970	417 (greatest loss)
1975	350
1980	304
1990	233
1994	215

(Membership Records of the Sisters of Compassion;SC8).

Before 1960, an average of 1 or 2 sisters per year left the order, often for reasons of health, and normally before final profession. By the mid-1960s, losses through defection began to exceed losses through death. The biggest drop in numbers occurred between 1968 and 1970,

when 73 members were lost in two years. Since 1965, the peak year for membership (when vocations outnumbered or were equal to deaths and defections), the order has lost 295 members, only 1/3 of these by death. Defections accounted for most of their losses from the late 60s until the mid 1970s, when things began to stabilize. The order now loses most of its members by death, at the rate of approximately 7 members per year. During the 18-month period of this fieldwork, 10 members of the community passed away. As with other apostolic orders, decreasing numbers have meant an increase in the median age of sisters, which is now approaching 70 years. This means that there are fewer younger sisters actively working that can support the community financially. This has also meant a higher mortality rate as a larger percentage of the membership are being lost through death. Although the defection rate has declined considerably, with no recruitment for the past 12 years, the future of the order in the United States is tenuous at best. This situation has created problems for the sisters who remain. While recent consolidation and incorporation of Latin American communities into one Institute is a positive step, it does not guarantee that numbers in the United States will increase.

In summary, the Sisters of Compassion have experienced profound organizational change. Today most

aspects of the cloister have been eliminated for them, as well as for most active sisters. The sense of anomie and identity disruption that resulted from some of these changes is cited as the major reason for the decline of religious orders today (Ebaugh, 1993:26-27). The Sisters of Compassion have followed a pattern similar to other apostolic orders in the post Vatican II era. They have come closer to secular women in work tasks, living arrangements, dress, and daily concerns.

In a sense, the order has come full circle; that is, it more closely resembles the institute founded long ago in Ireland by a group of women concerned about the social welfare of the poor. Its recruitment of lay apostolates (who work as volunteers but do not take vows) is reminiscent of their early days in Dublin. With all of its organizational problems and the specific work tasks that have altered over time, the original mission of the the Sisters of Compassion has not changed -- that is, serving the poor and needy of society. Their central task of active aid to those in need, whether through education or ministering to the physical and emotional needs of others, is still being carried out. Originally, although guided by a special spirituality, the foundress had had reservations about bureaucratic, organized religion. The foundation of a religious order was necessary at that time for these women to carry out their goals unhindered. Their work, which began on the streets of Dublin,

continues today in the cities and rural areas of poverty throughout the world. How long their Institute will continue as a viable organization under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church, however, is a question for all active religious orders today who are suffering from the loss of membership and resources. Their recent consolidation with sisters working in Latin America and other areas of urban and rural poverty may help deter the decline of this particular order.

In this chapter I have outlined the historical background, organization, lifestyles, and demographics of one apostolic order, providing a case study that demonstrates what is happening to many other active orders in the United States today. Their particular experience can be viewed in the context of the history of religious orders of women in the Catholic Church, including the more recent effects of Vatican II.

In contrast to the active sisters discussed in this chapter, whose mission is both spiritual and pragmatic, contemplative nuns are a very different type of religious order. The following chapter outlines the history of one such contemplative order, their goals and objectives, as well as their internal structure, lifestyle, and demographics, and how these were affected by Vatican II.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONTEMPLATIVE ORDER: THE SOLEMNITES

In this chapter, I discuss in some detail the history and organizational structure, as well as the lifestyle and demographics of the contemplative order, with a view towards explaining the ways in which the order has been affected by change since Vatican II. Contemplative nuns represent a special category of religious women who live a life of enclosure, offering to God their prayers and penances for the benefit of others. Their community exemplifies the unity of all spheres of life, a culture which can best be described as one of wholeness. The lifestyle of the Solemnites might also be characterized as an "inversion" of the contemporary American model in terms of meanings and values, which is evident in such things as the rule of silence as a source of spiritual sustenance.

The case study order is referred to here as the Solemnites, a pseudonym. To my knowledge there is no such order of that name and in order to protect anonymity, pseudonyms are also used for particular persons. Direct reference to archival and other identifying materials will not be made here but are henceforth coded and listed in Appendix B. This chapter is based on formal interviews with the Mother Superior, informal conversations with some

of the 25 nuns who reside at the monastery, archival material provided by the sisters, as well as time spent as a guest of the community.

Historical Background

The Solemnite Order has its roots in a small rural village of northern Canada, where a young girl was sent to a convent school at the age of 12. Here Marie's vocation was fostered and at 18 she made it known that she was strongly drawn to a cloistered life. Her parents objected due to her poor health, but after discussions with several local bishops, plans were made for the foundation of a contemplative order, since no such order existed in Canada at that time.

The Solemnites were founded on September 14, 1861 with two male co-founders; formal approval from the Holy See was granted in 1893. In the meantime sisters had arrived in the United States in 1888. At the request of bishops in different cities, eleven monasteries were founded in the United States, Canada, and Cuba before the death of the foundress in 1905. Subsequently, three more were founded in the United States and one in China (Archival Materials, SN1:II-XII).

While it was customary for branches of female monastic communities to be established through male sponsorship, the community of Solemnites under study here was actually brought about at the urging of the Sisters of Compassion (who were mentioned in the last

chapter.) The latter had been successful in establishing many institutions, among them a large hospital and a boardinghouse for self-supporting women. In 1898, the Mother Superior of the Sisters of Compassion was visited by a woman who told her of many cases of "ill-regulated public dances, shows, and other temptations" (Archival Material, SC4:146) corrupting the people of the city. She saw the need for a group of cloistered nuns to intercede spiritually on behalf of these people and had heard of a group of such nuns having established a community in the United States. After writing to the Solemnites and receiving their assent, Mother was able to secure the promise of material aid from the local bishop. In November, 1898 their Mother Superior and nine sisters arrived to live in a monastery purchased by the Bishop. The Sisters of Compassion, who had prepared the monastery for their contemplative counterparts, were there to greet them when they arrived and have had a sisterly fondness for them to this day (Archival Materials, SC4:147). Similarly, the Solemnites refer to the Sisters of Compassion as their "big sisters" (Field Notes 10:2, 5/5/93).

Goals and Work Tasks

In contrast to the apostolic order whose mission is active work in the world, contemplative orders live a life of prayer and penance, adhering to the principles of enclosure. This means that members of the community are

prohibited from leaving the grounds of the monastery and that entry of outsiders is restricted. Their goals are to promote spirituality in themselves and to intercede through prayer and good works on behalf of others. The words of their Mother Foundress explain their purpose:

The Solemnites shall pray for those who blaspheme; for those who weep; for those who barter their eternity for the things that perish; for ungrateful man who disowns and neglects the Divine Crucified One and crucifies Him anew each day...Virgins of Reparation, they shall pray for the hearts broken by suffering and haunted by despair; for the just that they be more just; for the priest that he be more holy...As victims of reparation, these religious shall ever unite their voices to the voice of the Redeeming Blood, crying for grace and pardon for themselves and for their brethren (Archival Materials SC4:146).

The Solemnite nuns live on alms and whatever income is generated by their other works: traditionally they were responsible for baking altar bread and making clerical vestments and altar linens. Today they no longer bake or sew but continue to distribute altar bread (communion hosts) to various parishes. Their other activities include art and calligraphy, statue repairing and painting, and secretarial work. They also operate a store in which they sell religious greeting cards and calendars that they make, as well as books, pamphlets, and other religious articles. The primary work of the Solemnites, however, is prayer. ("Orare est laborare" -- to pray is to work). The day revolves around prayers said at specific intervals, as well as Masses, for the special intentions of those who request them. The Mother Superior

indicated that their phone never stops ringing.

People come in for prayers or just to talk to someone. They are under stress (Field Notes 10:140, 5/5/93)

All of their activities revolve around prayer life which they offer to the population at large, originally the Catholic population, but now for anyone who comes to them for this. The sisters appear to act as informal counselors and prayer intercessors for people and conduct special prayer services for specific groups. One such group was for men only which was started 30 years ago with the belief that if men are held close to prayer life, their families will be protected. They also help raise money for the diocese through telephone solicitation and advertisements.

The primary goal of the Solemnites is creating in their members a special spirituality which is then thought to be transferred outward. This process serves the function of legitimating for those who have contact with them a belief in the power of prayer, bolstering their faith and giving it a special sanctity which is aided by the physical presence, austerity, and peace symbolized by the monastic community.

The actual work tasks performed by the nuns are of secondary importance to their primary goal, which is prayer; this is their most important "work." The nuns engage in three types of activity which can be categorized as: spiritual, pragmatic, and domestic. Spiritual

activities refer to specific acts of prayer, guidance, and ritual directed towards specific others; pragmatic tasks are those requiring special skills such as artistic talent or administrative tasks associated with work performed for the diocese; domestic tasks would include those chores related to the daily sustenance of the community and upkeep of the monastery itself. While the pragmatic and domestic tasks of the nuns may change over time, depending upon the needs of the diocese, new methods for generating donations, and technological changes which have altered some domestic and administrative tasks, their spiritual activities are fixed over time and it is these that they consider paramount. Their primary goal is spiritual, while their pragmatic and domestic tasks are the means through which this goal can be achieved.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the Solemnites consists of three levels of authority: international, national, and local. After the success of the first foundation, several other monasteries were built in Canada and the United States at the request of local bishops. In the 1940s, Canadian bishops asked that the sisters form some kind of organization. According to one administrator, this was to facilitate transmittal of information from Rome to all affiliated monasteries. In Canada this resulted in the formation of two separate organizations: a French-speaking Generalate and an

English-speaking Generalate. In addition, an American Federation was formed for monasteries in the U.S.

Although all three federations are tied historically to the original foundation, each one has its own President and council, elected by the membership. As new monasteries are founded, they become self-sufficient and have their own by-laws, although they follow the constitution and rules set forth by their own Federation.

The American Federation consists of seven autonomous communities with one President, referred to as the President-Secretariat of the American Federation. On the local level, each monastery has its own Mother Superior, the Mother Assistant, Treasurer, and two council members, all elected by the membership. The number of council members may vary by the number of women in the monastery, a change which would be reflected in their own individual by-laws. The Mother Superiors and their councils meet to elect the President-Secretariat and her council every four years. Those who receive the largest numbers of votes hold the offices in hierarchical order; that is, no one runs for a specific office. This process is the same at both local and federation levels. On the Federation level, the Mother Superior and council members must be from different monasteries in order that a more equal representation is ensured.

Because the order has pontifical status, meaning that it is under direct Papal authority, the Federation is

assigned a Papal liasion who answers questions regarding canon law or their constitution as the need arises. They are allowed to request a specific person if they so desire and his appointment is up for renewal every three years. This is done by submitting a request with the candidate's requirements to Rome. At present the order has a canon lawyer who serves as their emissary, a young man who the Mother Superior referred to as "a brotherly helper." This familial tone is evident in the way they speak of the diocesan bishops and the way they are referred to by the clergy; for example, one monsignor referred to the sisters as "his powerhouse of prayer." This is also evident in the following statement from the Annals of the order describing their arrival in the diocese.

On their arrival at the station, they were met by Bishop Casey who assured them that he would be to them a father. This he truly proved himself by his thoughtfulness for the spiritual and temporal needs of the Community (Archival Materials SC4:147).

The functions of the Federation include preserving the "charism" of the institute; that is, promoting the philosophy of the Mother Foundress: to offer mutual support financially when necessary; to offer mutual aid in the form of personnel if needed; and to provide a better formation (training) program for newcomers. Directresses of Novices meet once a year to discuss improvements in the training of new recruits. Superiors within the Federation meet periodically and in some cases help one another. Although it is understood upon entering a specific

monastery that one will remain there and not be transferred to another, there are cases where sisters may be sent temporarily if the need arises. However, a sister must volunteer for this; for example, one of the sisters in the monastery under study volunteered to help where the current Mother Superior was 85 and her assistant 86 years of age. In the foundation of new monasteries, which are usually facilitated through bishops, sisters cannot be sent against their will. Volunteers are requested and they put their names in a box, from which the council members decide who will be accepted.

Unlike active orders who are members of the LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious), canon law prohibits cloistered nuns from joining this organization. Instead they may belong to the ACS (Association of Contemplative Sisters) which serves as a support group but not a political body. The Solemnites no longer retain membership in this group, as the Mother Superior explained that they were too liberal and did not serve any positive function for them.

The Caste System: Prior to Vatican II the internal structure of each community was comprised of three categories: choir sisters, extern sisters, and lay sisters. The choir nuns were the most educated, recited the Divine Office 7 times daily, and could hold office; the "out-sisters" or extern nuns might work on the grounds, do shopping, and have contact with lay people in

order to conduct business. The lay sisters did domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, or working in the infirmary. This caste system indicates that the higher rank of choir sister remained more cloistered than the others. Higher education, including knowledge of Latin was required of them and only the choir sister could hold administrative office. Mother Mary Francis indicated to me that these sisters required a special strength, both physically and emotionally, which contradicts the notion that the hardier person physically would be more suited for domestic and outside manual labor. On the contrary, it seems this requirement is reversed due to the physical and emotional demands of the cloistered lifestyle. It is the responsibility of the Mother Superior to designate which categories members will take. In discussing the decision to place certain members into these categories, the Mother Superior explained it this way.

It was decided by the Superior after a combination of discussion and input; she would ask how was your health; once a real brain was put in the outside category because her health wasn't good. There are tensions inside; inside you don't have any distractions; we say the Office seven times a day; we rose at midnight for prayers. We have long readings. An "out-sister" had shorter prayers. They knew that all their lifetime they would not have to make decisions. Their life would be to take orders all their lives....Someone may request being a lay sister out of humility; often it depends on one's temperament and health -- how strong you are (Field Notes 10:143-144, 5/5/93)

While extern sisters would have more contact with the outside world, their position is not seen as a privilege; similarly lay sisters, although perhaps capable physically

of certain tasks, are not considered "strong" enough for a life of total enclosure as routinely lived by the choir sisters. An important point needs to be mentioned here. The lay sisters are not required to recite the Divine Office which is mandatory for choir sisters. This is often for reasons of ill health or emotional weakness. The Mother Superior strongly emphasized that all sisters help with domestic chores but that lay sisters are in charge of the kitchen and infirmary and coordinate the work. This arrangement allows the choir sisters to recite the divine office. In keeping with what has been written about their foundress, all work within the monastery, no matter how lowly, is considered necessary and sacred.

The Venerable Mother Foundress of this Institute had an elevated idea of manual labor, and by her exhortations, writings, and example, she instilled the same spirit in the minds of her spiritual daughters (Archival Materials SN3:13).

Despite what some of the sisters themselves refer to as a "caste system," -- categories that were formally eliminated after Vatican II -- they have emphasized to me that the sharing of work tasks has always been their tradition; for example, all of the nuns may help hang out laundry and gather at the sound of a bell to help fold it together. These tasks are sometimes integrated into their daily schedule; for example, I observed the sisters singing and reciting prayers while folding laundry. Also, on the lower community level the role of Mother Superior has changed. Previously much of the actual daily lives of

the nuns was up to the discretion of the Superior. It appears that this is still the case, but there is more input now from the membership on these issues. One change has been in the title of "Mother" which has been changed to "Sister," in order to have an equalizing effect between superior and the membership; however, many still refer to their superior as Mother. In answer to my question about democratic changes since Vatican II, the Mother Superior answered:

Years ago the Mother Superior made changes. There is more dialogue today and greater elasticity. Sisters will decide what will change and how. Everything was conformity until 1965. We didn't question things. Today we would ask: why? People react today I think. They are questioning more. They don't take things for granted. We may decide to do something and a few years later someone might say why are we doing that so we might make yet another change (Field Notes 15: 198, 10/18/93).

In addition to the formal categories within, there was complete separation of the postulants and novices from professed sisters. The process of transition from novice to professed sister was described by one sister as "coming down." Once professed, the boundaries between those who had taken final vows and those in training was absolute.

You had to stop talking to novices. This was very hard because for four years you were together and now we couldn't speak. I cried my eyes out over this. We took it in stride though...but sometimes I think there were rules for the sake of rules. They had always done it this way...something triggered it and they just kept it up. (Field Notes 10:149, 5/5/93.)

Today with fewer vocations and less rigidity on separation, the newer sisters mix right away with the group for meals and certain rituals, while adhering to

their own time schedules and training activities which are conducted separately.

Vows and Lifestyles

Similar to active orders, the contemplatives take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and have their own rules, constitutions, and customs which are uniform for all of their separate monasteries. While active sisters once adhered to a semi-cloistered lifestyle, contemplative nuns have always followed the restrictions imposed by "enclosure."

Before proceeding with a discussion of lifestyles, it must be emphasized at this point that beyond the above description of goals, work, and external and internal structure as viewed by an outsider, there are several problems associated with understanding the culture of the contemplative nuns. Monastic religious orders isolate themselves by virtue of adherence to a specific cosmology, a worldview which includes notions regarding nature, gender, time, space, and ultimate questions regarding life and death. This accounts for the difficulty of separating out spheres of their lives for analysis. It becomes necessary to view their lives as a whole because such things as notions of spirituality, bodily needs, pragmatic tasks, and daily ritual are intertwined. Goffman's concept of the "total institution" (1961:3-7) applies here in that all spheres of life are incorporated. This may account for what appears to be a distinctive

interpretation of the vows which at first glance appear the same as those taken by apostolic sisters. For the Solemnites poverty means "having just enough" and chastity may not be so much a separate vow but another form of poverty or denial. In one study of a Carmelite community, this was referred to as a kind of "poverty of the heart" (Williams, 1981:120) --- that is, separation from friends and family and lack of social relations, thereby creating an inner void to make room for spiritual fulfillment.

Obedience is completely voluntary, pledged out of love, not fear, and by the time of final vows a mutual interdependency is established (Williams, 1981:121). The Solemnites emphasized that they owe allegiance to their particular monastery rather than to the order itself, to the Church hierarchy, or to any one individual. They cannot be forced to go to another community within the order as it is understood that they are committed to a particular community until death.

In addition, their meaning system includes definitions that are not necessarily consistent with that of the outside world, nor with other non-cloistered religious orders. In many ways the cloister is an "inversion," similar to a photographic negative, of life on the outside; that is, what is valued on the outside is not valued inside and vice versa. Denial is pleasurable, material possessions are irrelevant, individualism not important. Definitions of such terms as hierarchy,

strength, silence, and individuality contain symbolic meanings that are not consistent with those same terms as understood in modern American culture. For the Solemnites, hierarchy means in order of closeness to God, what comes first -- not deference to the power of punitive authority. Strength is thought of in both spiritual and physical terms, as expressed by the priority they afford to those who possess a combination of internal fortitude as well as physical stamina. Silence is not interpreted as a void, but as shared experience, the essence of which will be discussed below. The individual is not glorified as an independent entity but rather in terms of interdependence within the group, one who willingly and quietly shares her talents and efforts, no matter what those might be. The culture of the Solemnites, then, can only be understood within the context of their own cosmology, one that does not subscribe to Western, post-industrial, or scientific patterns. The duality of mind and body, the specialization, categorization, and separation of spheres common to most of us living in modern society is not present within the cloister. Only in the context of wholeness can their way of life be analyzed.

Keeping these qualifications in mind, in the following sections, I attempt to address some aspects of the contemplative life as it was explained to me by insiders and as it appeared to me, an outsider.

Exposure to the World: For contemplative nuns, the rule of enclosure means that limited contact with the outside world is the guiding principle by which all other aspects of life are regulated. The idea of "fugit mundi," meaning "flight from the world" has a long history within Christianity. Outsiders are prohibited from entering the community and nuns are generally not permitted to leave the monastery. Each monastery is a self-contained community. Mother Mary Francis expressed this in the following way:

The cloister is like a little city in miniature which contains everything. You have your people your hospital, pharmacy, and your own restaurant -- our refectory -- and cooks. All our clothes are done here. Everything within these four walls. I could not set one foot out there where you are (Field Notes 10:143, 5/5/93).

Aspects of enclosure are evident immediately upon entering the monastery. The peace and silence that greet one in the foyer are overwhelming. The foyer is enclosed on all sides and all doors are locked; one rings the doorbell on a wall beyond which is the "touriere," the nun who has the responsibility of greeting outsiders. She also operates the revolving hatch through which communications enter the monastery from the outside world. Sisters speak to outsiders through wooden slats in the parlor; there is a revolving hatch in the parlor as well.

Before Vatican II, only extern sisters had contact with the outside by virtue of being assigned tasks that necessitated leaving convent walls. As life in general in

modern society has meant that fewer services are brought to individuals, so too has this affected the cloister. In the past, for example, physicians and dentists came to the convent, as well as vendors of all sorts who delivered medicine, groceries, and other supplies. In society at large, some of these services and goods were delivered to the public, such as milk, bakery items, and dry cleaning; physicians often made home visits. This is rare today for anyone. The sisters spoke of how spoiled they had been in the past in that now they have to wait in dentists' offices just like anyone else. In keeping with the increased need to leave the monastery, extern sisters today are expected to be able to drive a car.

The Solemnites travel in pairs to do shopping or any other errands required. This is not viewed as a privilege. One of their sisters is now taking art lessons and the Mother Superior expressed disappointment that the art teacher could not come to the convent. She is allowing the sister to attend lessons in order that she can teach other sisters. In summary, the world is encroaching further onto the convent and not the other way around. More contact has come out of necessity and not desire. One sister referred to this as "another form of penance." The Mother Superior and her council may travel for chapter meetings at other monasteries, but would adhere to the same cloistral rules once they arrive.

Other limitations on exposure to the world have been

retained. For example, the sisters do not watch television or read newspapers or popular magazines. The Mother Superior may allow one sister to watch the news in the evening and to keep the others posted on important events. The television is also used for spiritual and educational videos, particularly for novices. Reading materials are restricted to religious literature and sisters must seek permission from the Mother Superior for any other books they may wish to read. These rules are explicitly stated in the Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns (dated August 15, 1969).

Daily Schedule: The Solemnites arise at 5:25 a.m., recite the Divine Office together at 6:00 a.m., attend Mass at 7:15a.m., have breakfast at 7:55 a.m., and then proceed to carry out their individual domestic or administrative tasks for the morning. One young nun has the responsibility of extracting all of the wax built up on the candle holders in the Chapel. I observed her going about this task which took almost 30 minutes to accomplish. Others may have the responsibility of monitoring the doorbell or the telephone or other clerical duties; some have specific domestic tasks. At 11:25 they meet to recite their Office and lunch is served at noon. The nuns resume working until 2:35 when they again recite the Office and then listen to a spiritual reading from 3:00 to 3:30 p.m. They work until 5:00 when the Divine Office is said, after which the rosary is recited,

followed by individual prayer until dinner at 6:00 p.m. The Divine Office is recited at 8:00 p.m., followed by a communal recreation period from 8:25 to 9:25 p.m. The sisters retire at 9:45 p.m. Their schedule, which is referred to as the "Order of the Day," is a blend of work and prayer.

Our schedule is go go go...you can't sit and do nothing. Time goes too slowly that way (Field Notes 15:202;10/18/93).

Despite what may seem a rigid schedule, work tasks and prayer are often integrated in unique ways. It was also emphasized to me that the Divine Office is a community obligation; therefore, if your work or an administrative responsibility makes it difficult for you to be physically present, the community takes care of this obligation; however, sisters are encouraged to make this up on their own. In addition, depending upon what chores need to be done, prayers are said in conjunction with work tasks; for example, raking the grounds, gardening, washing the windows and scrubbing floors may involve most of the community, in which case, spiritual readings may be done while performing a physical task such as sewing or raking.

Dress: Before Vatican II, similar to apostolic orders, the sisters wore a full habit which covered all but face and hands, until the Vatican's mandate for change reached the cloistered orders as well. The general guidelines for modification of the habit came out of a joint decision-making process. The details of their garb were left up to

those in charge of making the habits, with the general guidelines agreed upon by the membership. Today the headpiece is much simpler, the dress a bit shorter but thick stockings are worn. The habit is uniform for all members throughout the order. One stipulation on this was that one could not be forced to give up the traditional habit if she chose not to. The habit also differentiates postulants, novices, and the professed by color of headpiece and other symbols. (Postulants wear a black skirt, white blouse, and black veil; novices wear a white skirt, white blouse, and red bolero with white veil; the fully professed nun wears a white dress, red bolero and black veil). The habit continues to be an important symbol of group identity within the monastery as well as for the order itself and a differentiator of ranking, symbolizing the important rites of passage before full profession takes place.

Social Relations: By virtue of a life of separation from the world, the social relationships of sisters are for the most part limited to the sisters themselves. According to the sisters, increased collaboration among nuns after Vatican II and desire for more input has changed the former relationships somewhat. The elimination of the old caste system has created a more equalized atmosphere, although the Mother Superior is still considered the final authority within the monastery.

Although the old categories were eliminated as such,

the tasks of externs, lay sisters, and choir sisters follow very much as they did in the past. Elimination of formal categories was in keeping with the Vatican's Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life which stated the following:

Unless conditions really suggest something else, care should be taken that there be only one class of Sisters in communities of women. Only that distinction of persons should be retained which corresponds to the diversity of works for which the Sisters are destined, either by special vocation from God or by reason of special aptitude (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life: Article 16).

In the case of the Solemnites, the former categorizations, although not considered in hierarchical order per se, have been retained in the sense that these categories do still reflect their specific tasks and goals. Since there are still extern sisters, for example, these are listed separately; however, lay and choir sisters are not formally differentiated and all sisters take part in the decision-making process of the community. In addition, as mentioned above, it was emphasized to me that work is often shared by all.

Depending upon the numbers of new recruits, the postulants may not be separated from the rest of the community if they are a very small group. However, they are treated with special fondness, as well as watchfulness and guidance. They do not participate in recreation in the community room, but if there are few postulants, they may join the community for meals. In the past, formal

separation was strictly adhered to and once professed, sisters were not to associate with postulants or novices. The postulancy has been extended from 6 months to one year. The novitiate is now two years and annual vows are taken for three years before the final vows (sometimes referred to as perpetual vows) are taken. Sometimes final profession may be postponed if a novice, or the community, feels that she is not ready. According to the current laws of the Church, the Solemnites have a total of 9 years of formation allowed before final vows. With regard to these changes, the Mother Superior stated:

There was stability in those days. Before my generation our older sisters came in and were received after 6 or 9 months. A 103 year old sister told us about this. Stability is foreign to our generation. They had perpetual commitment. This way the Church is extending the time and we now have 9 years of formation according to the laws of the Church before final vows. When we became sisters we were dressed as brides. Now there is no big ceremony. You move from one stage to the other and first vows are taken within the context of a Mass and there is no big celebration because you might have a big reception and a month later she'd be gone (Field Notes 10:146, 5/5/93).

With fewer numbers of entrants the separation is not as strict and it is deemed more important to make new members feel comfortable with the community from the beginning. There appears to be an air of protectiveness about postulants, as described in one statement by the Mother Superior:

As a postulant you are protected. So many things you don't see. Human nature being what it is, this is a good thing. As a postulant you study but we don't make life too difficult...we correct them but not overly so. Once a novice you are accountable...

before that you are treated like a youngster in the family (Field Notes 10:146, 5/5/93).

The Rule of Silence: The sisters live a communal life but one of the key aspects of that life is silence. This is in keeping with the tradition of St. Benedict, whose words on the subject of silence follow:

Indeed so important is silence that permission to speak should seldom be granted even to mature disciples, no matter how good or holy or constructive their talk, because it is written: "In a flood of words you will not avoid sin" (Prov 10:19); and elsewhere, "The tongue holds the key to life and death (Prov 18:21). Speaking and teaching are the master's task; the disciple is to be silent and listen. Therefore, any requests to a superior should be made with all humility and respectful submission. We absolutely condemn in all places any vulgarity and gossip and talk leading to laughter, and we do not permit a disciple to engage in words of that kind" (St. Benedict's Rule, in Fry (ed), 1982:31).

The sisters observe the rule of silence all day, except as dialogue becomes necessary in the course of doing their work. The Divine Office is still said together five times daily, singing is communal, meals are taken together, during which silence is observed, at the discretion of the Mother Superior, and one hour of recreation time is taken in the evenings. The sisters may converse, play games, play musical instruments, sing, or do handwork. According to the sisters, most often one person will speak at a time while the others listen. This was described by the sisters as individuals expressing themselves according to their own need in the form of various activities but not necessarily in conversation. The sisters do not speak of each other's families, nor discuss their respective

histories with one another. The Mother Superior explained that this was to equalize relations. In addition, the engagement in trivial conversation is discouraged. One sister explained that she would express concern for another not by asking a question such as "How are you today?" but by saying, "I hope you had a restful night." This relays a message of concern but does not encourage discussion or complaints from the other (Field Notes 15:201, 10/18/93).

Silence is greatly honored; talk seen as useless and tiring. Mother Mary Francis spoke of the terrible strain of conversation, especially when there are rules about what can be discussed.

Talking is very tiring...as a newly professed nun I dreaded recreation to no end. We were supposed to talk and do handwork and I never knew what to say (Field Notes 10:148, 5/5/93).

For those with little knowledge of monastic life there is the assumption that the rule of silence is imposed as a form of penance; that is, the assumption that nuns impose this rule on themselves to enhance mortification and promote inner spirituality or to curb individualism and free expression. In keeping with the words of St. Benedict on silence, there may be an element of truth to this in that there is recognition of the dangers of gossip and hurtful words. However, it may also be that silence is merely another way of communicating on a deeper level.

Similarly, Japanese culture is noted for its mistrust of words and its emphasis on non-verbal communication

(Lebra, 1976:252-253). The word "haragei" connotes a kind of visceral communication" (Rheingold, 1988:53-54) where words are not trusted; this may be more common to homogeneous societies whereby unspoken values are commonly shared. Zen Buddhism also denies to language the role of communication of information and of logical reasoning; hence, the suppression of verbalism and an emphasis on indirection and intuiting what is hidden (Befu, 1983:176).

The homogeneity of the religious community may more easily allow them to establish and share a common culture of silence. In addition, the rule of silence is consistent with a worldview that de-emphasizes overt expressions of individuality or self-centeredness, as well as "small talk," which in contemporary society is considered polite and/or supportive of others. As an element of social relations, the issue of silence presents for the outsider the question of whether interaction can sustain itself without verbal communication; and further, whether social relations are in fact possible without talk. One possible explanation which can be offered, with caution, is that there may be a form of "sociation" possible that sustains itself through the notion of community that is not dependent upon individual disclosures through talk and intimacy. It may be that the human need for intimacy is fulfilled through an introspective process -- a relationship between the person and a higher power; that is, a spirituality not dependent

upon human relations as we know them. The "shared silence" of the community, rather than constant verbal affirmations, may fulfill the human needs for self-expression and especially a sense of belonging. There is no way that this can be tested conclusively. It is one possible explanation for the fact that Solemnite women appear to live out this sort of life with apparent joy and satisfaction.

Demographics

Although the contemplative order has experienced a solid decrease in membership since Vatican II, they have recently begun to attract new recruits. The following table gives numbers of American sisters by decade from 1950 to 1993.

TABLE VI.1: Membership of the Solemnite Nuns: 1960-1993

<u>Year</u>	<u>Professed Sisters</u>	<u>Novices</u>	<u>Postulants</u>
1960	129	6	4
1970	129	1	1
1980	114	2	0
1990	87	7	0
1993	77	8	3

(Source: Official Catholic Directories: 1950-1993)
 Note: Official numbers before 1960 were only available for the entire order; the American Federation had not yet been formed and was not listed separately; the nuns themselves did not have numbers, although they assert that vocations were fairly stable from 1945 to 1960.

 In 1960, 4 candidates entered and 6 novices were accepted while in 1993, 3 women entered and 8 novices were accepted. Given the fewer numbers of professed nuns

today, the numbers of recruits constitute a much larger percentage of the total membership than they have during the 70s and 80s. In 1960 about 7 percent of the total were members in training, while in 1993 novices and postulants represented 12 percent of the convent membership, with 11 percent having taken first vows.

Between 1984 and 1993 the community has had 22 vocations retaining 12 of those. According to the Mother Superior, this is as it has always been. They consider an average of one successful vocation per year as the norm. In answer to the question of why numbers of vocations are rising, the Mother Superior had this to say:

We lost many as did other orders after Vatican II and many of our sisters are dying. But to answer your question, here you know exactly why you exist. You have set goals and you know what your expectations for the future are. This is very important for a young girl...They know they will have to give up many things. This is what people want today, a challenge. We are not going to live in an active community and live the same way we would at home (Sister MF; Field Notes 10:139-140, 5/5/93).

Between 1985 and 1990, 11 sisters were lost but 11 had entered to replace them. Numbers had dropped in the 70s and when asked to comment on this, Mother Mary Francis offered the following explanation:

The 40s and 50s were an aberration. They never expected so many vocations. Our numbers are not that much greater than 9 years ago because of deaths. When this monastery was built numbers were not realistic; if you read about religious life of the past 20 years, the larger numbers were not reality; we did not expect to have so many. After World War II faith may have reached its peak. Also the communists closed a convent in China and we had 9

sisters come here. There were many factors but it was not ordinary; we went from 36 to 48 sisters here in a few years. This monastery was built in 1954 for 50 sisters and we have only half of that now. I would say between 30-35 was the norm to have here at one time. This is closer to what we have here now (Field Notes 10A:Addendum, 6/15/93).

Although numbers have dropped during the post-Vatican II era, resulting in the rising median age of nuns today, the present numbers of vocations indicate that the average age of nuns may be lower in the future; and if recruitment continues, the membership could increase as well. Generally, a higher age has been required for entrance into cloistered orders, depending upon the strictness of the order; while some required that their members be 21 or older, the Solemnites have accepted women at age 18. Today the age of new entrants ranges from 21 to 32 years, older than in the past. According to the Mother Superior, they look for both emotional maturity and some college education for those making the decision to enter; in addition, women in their mid-20s and 30s are more likely to be successful in the cloister than those who are very young or middle-aged. While the age of entrance has increased somewhat, the Solemnites are not facing the same problems of non-recruitment evident in other orders and have been successful in attracting relatively young women to their way of life.

In summary, just as it had for apostolic orders, the Second Vatican Council mandated change for cloistered nuns. The Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the

Religious Life states:

Papal cloister should be maintained in the case of nuns engaged exclusively in the contemplative life. However, it must be adjusted to conditions of time and place and obsolete practices suppressed. This should be done after due consultation with the monasteries in question. But other nuns applied by rule to apostolic work outside the convent should be exempted from papal cloister in order to enable them better to fulfill the apostolic duties entrusted to them. Nevertheless cloister is to be maintained according to the prescriptions of their constitutions (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, October 28, 1965: paragraph 16).

While all sisters were asked to update customs and rules, in accordance with their original missions, the contemplatives were issued a separate set of guidelines in the Venite Seorsum, issued by the United States Catholic Conference on August 15, 1969. This document (Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns) is the only decree issued specifically for female orders, yet it deals exclusively with the contemplative orders. It outlines the norms to be followed, giving some leeway to the monasteries themselves but more guidance as to what would be expected. With regard to some of the changes implemented by the Solemnites, the Mother Superior replied:

There's an old saying in religious life: "Something that has been done for 40 years becomes a rule." You just do it because it's always been done. That's gone forever because life is so quick today. We don't have time to put into these little rules. (Sister MF; Field Notes 10:149, 5/5/93).

Since Vatican II, contemplative nuns are permitted to exercise more initiative; preferences are taken into

account and accommodated where possible. The old categories were eliminated as such, although still reflected in the duties the nuns perform and in the fact that "externs" are still formally differentiated as a category. They do not have midnight prayers anymore and their schedule has been altered; for example, they rise at 5:25 a.m. rather than 5:00 a.m. and retire at 9:45 p.m. They now recite the divine office five, rather than seven times daily. However, structure remains and every hour of the day is accounted for. More free time was allowed after Vatican II, but structured around what is deemed necessary, such as exercise periods, chapel, and work tasks. Penances are not inflicted as they once were but reprimands are used when necessary. The elaborate profession ceremony has been eliminated and the average age of those taking final vows has been extended. The traditional habit has been modified but is consistent for all members, retaining a sense of uniformity and anonymity for members. The regulation of social relations, including the rule of silence, is maintained. Finally, after a period of decreased vocations, the Solemnites are experiencing the renewed interest of new recruits, reflected in the time they report they are now spending on improving the training program for postulants. The appearance of many young faces around the monastery attests to the fact that they are not facing the same crisis as the apostolic order, whose membership consists

of a much older age cohort.

In the words of the Mother Superior: "We were changed by both the world and Vatican II" (Field Notes 10:142, 5/5/93); yet the Solemnites have retained a certain worldview, one that is legitimated by the Roman Catholic Church. Evident here is the familial type of relations both within the monastery, as well as with the Catholic hierarchy, a collegial, communal type of existence that reflects the original aspects of the Benedictine Rule. The sisters have incorporated aspects of the wider culture (for example, their acceptance of some democratic decision-making), adapted to the changes mandated by Rome, but maintained a certain continuity in their lifestyle that stands in stark contrast to apostolic orders as well as to mainstream American culture.

On the other hand, empirical observations and actual everyday lives of the nuns reflect an acknowledgement of the outside world. The ordering of time, space, and ritual is humanly designed, adapted to, and lived out. There is recognition of human limitation and the influence of outside culture. The word "monastery" is derived from the Greek word "monos" meaning solitary and the word convent is derived from the Latin word "conventus" meaning living together. The Solemnites reflect the curious combination of aloneness and community which cannot ordinarily be described by conventional organizational models.

In order to more fully analyze and compare both apostolic and contemplative orders in terms of organizational change after Vatican II, in the following chapter, I examine the convent as a social system, comparing the functional aspects and structural differences which have influenced the adaptability of both of these case-study orders to institutional and societal change.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONVENT AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I use data on both the apostolic and contemplative orders so as to analyze on the structural level the comparative stability of each as a social system. In terms of functional organization, it appears that the Sisters of Compassion are in far more jeopardy than the Solemnites and the reasons for this are also examined in this chapter. I use a conceptual model, taking a functionalist approach, to identify the structural problems encountered by each order. I then compare the communities in terms of their present viability.

A Systems Model

Social systems may operate within a larger institution as well as the wider society. The two case-study orders, apostolic and contemplative, exist and operate within the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as within American society. To see the evolution of a social system over time, we must view it both internally and externally; that is, not only as a separate entity in its own right, but also in terms of its relationship with its environment. In his analysis of cults, Galanter (1989) identified four functions that serve to protect any system and implement its goals. These

functions are: transformation, monitoring, feedback, and boundary control (Galanter, 1989:98). Transformation deals with both internal and external issues; the monitoring function operates at a level that is internal to the system; while feedback and boundary maintenance have to do with the relationship of the system to its environment. Using this model as a basic framework, I will explain each of these functions and then discuss them here, using data I collected from the particular communities studied.

Transformation

In order to fulfill its primary task, any system must transform resources into a product, a process which can be likened to factory output (Galanter, 1989:99). Other functions of the system are geared towards promoting the primary task of the organization, as well as preventing the disruption or demise of the system; for example, "the primary task of most cults is to prepare for the messianic end they envision" (Galanter, 1989:99). The primary task of the Sisters of Compassion was twofold: to promote Catholicism through education and to live out the gospel of Christ through prayer life, as well as aid to the physically and emotionally poor. For the Solemnites the primary task was to develop inner spirituality in members which would facilitate intercession with God for the benefit of others.

For both congregations to carry out their primary goals, the secondary goal of recruitment and replenishment

of members became very important. For teaching sisters, the convent became a training ground for religious educators in the United States and the parochial school served not only to perpetuate the faith, fulfilling the needs of Catholic immigrant groups, but also provided a means of fostering future vocations. For contemplatives, the goal of activating spirituality in the self and others required special training for its members. It is in this sense that the function of transformation can be thought of as being twofold: that is, each system had the primary goal of transforming its environment in some way, and secondly, this necessitated the recruitment and socialization of incoming members.

For any normative organization to survive, recruits must be transformed into willing functionaries. Young girls with vocations might be considered the "raw material" which was fed into the system. The transformation function of the convent began with a socialization process that resulted in total identification with the group. Based on my fieldwork, I can say that the process of entering and socialization of recruits was remarkably similar for both groups prior to Vatican II, with the added feature of total enclosure maintained for the contemplatives once professed.

Vocations and the re-socialization process are discussed below.

Entering: For the most part, women entered the convent at a very young age. The average age of entrance in my

interviewed sample was 18 years. (Entrance immediately after high school was traditional for both apostolic and contemplative nuns, but some monastic communities had a requirement of 21 years of age). Many of the respondents expressed the notion of vocation as being a strong desire (for example, to quote some of the sisters, "a raw knowing;" "a conscious pulling") that superseded other options they may have had. Virtually all of those interviewed expressed ambivalence, even some aversion to the "call" at first, but indicated that it was difficult to resist. This feeling has been referred to as "a ghastly certitude," (Demers, 1985 film), implying more conviction than choice. Many suffered the opposition of friends and family members and several women described happy childhoods and active dating lives before entering. Several were engaged to be married. Yet these women were looking for something which was not offered in traditional secular life at that time. This feeling was reflected in some of their statements.

I loved jewelry, boys, dancing. I had tasted that life and understood it, but in marriage I could not have been free to live what I have lived (Field Notes 1:9-10, 9/15/92).

One of my biggest sacrifices was giving up dancing. I had boyfriends but there was no depth or meaning there, nothing to hold me over for the next day (Field Notes 4:56, 10/19/92).

In high school I got into boys...I was boy-crazy, but by the time it was my junior year I came back to my senses. After I got over that phase I decided to enter (Field Notes 10:145, 5/5/93).

I was into dancing and things such as that; I can remember being on the dance floor and a little voice inside me kept saying, "this is not you" and I'd get so mad! (Field Notes 11:166, 6/4/93).

Choice of orders was largely a function of contact in younger years. The large number of parochial schools afforded a place where vocations were fostered and most of the sisters indicated that they entered orders of religious by whom they had been taught in school. The contemplatives, however, showed more variation. Since contemplatives do not teach, there would not have been such contact; also the age requirement was higher for some contemplative orders since it is considered a more difficult life. One sister recalled not wanting to wait until the age of 21 to enter the order of her choice and instead entered the Solemnites who would accept her at age 18. She recalled visiting several communities before she decided, but for the vast majority, bonds had been forged early on by their school experiences, particularly for those who attended private boarding schools run by the sisters. It would follow that for those who chose the contemplative life (particularly when joining a particular monastery meant one would remain there for life), there was more variation and visiting of different communities before a decision was made.

Socialization: The socialization process as described by both active and contemplative sisters was very similar in the pre-Vatican II era, referred to today in religious

circles as "the great repression." Rules and rigidity were foremost and the monastic aspects of religious life emphasized. (Only two women in the sample were trained after 1965.) New entrants, referred to as "postulants," were expected to shed their former identities, to dress uniformly, not to discuss their former lives or families, to take religious names, and to learn the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. (cf. professionalization of paratroopers and the necessity of social isolation in the early stages of training, Khleif, 1981:174-175). Sisters were isolated from family and friends during the postulancy period, which lasted from six to nine months. They were issued only one habit which they were responsible for taking care of. The novitiate period, which lasted from one to two years, was one of intense training in the vows, particularly that of obedience, as well as the history and goals of the order, and Church history in general. There was no contact between the novice and her family or former friends. Temporary vows were taken annually until such time as the person, as well as the community, decided a sister was ready to take final vows. The length of time between entering and final vows varies by order. This could take as long as seven years for the Sisters of Compassion and five years for the Solemnites. (This is somewhat equivalent to a person acquiring citizenship in another country, the wait for some nuns being even more than 5 years.)

There were several key aspects of the socialization process of sisters. Overall, the virtues of humility and quiet dignity were fostered. In addition, the sister should exemplify inner restraint, fortitude, skill in matters of etiquette, and a certain anonymity among her peers. Rules and customs were carefully outlined, with explicit instructions on physical deportment, manners and etiquette, dining and other rituals, contact with seculars, relations between the sisters themselves, authority within the convent, topics for conversation, penances, and so forth. In essence, the sisters underwent a process of dehumanization, deindividuation, and defeminization, characterized by the denial of human frailty, the suppression of individual autonomy, and the de-emphasis on certain aspects of femininity. These three aspects are herewith discussed below, using some statements from the sisters interviewed.

De-humanization. Sisters were instructed not to discuss their former lives or families, to avoid "particular friendships," that is, personal relationships with other sisters, and to refrain from discussing problems or complaints with anyone other than their Mother Superior.

I'm not sure how to say this but I was thinking about particular friendships. I didn't even know what they were talking about. You were not to spend too much time with another person...you were not to expend emotional energy in that way (Field Notes 14:184, 8/4/93).

When asked about the discussion of emotional needs with her superior, another nun explained:

They were not equipped with psychological explanations..they only spoke in terms of grace (Field Notes 1:5, 9/15/92).

Conversation at recreation was limited to anecdotes, jokes, and pleasant discourse in general, rather than a sharing of feelings or problems. Emotional energy was to be directed towards spirituality, and consequently, emotional needs were to be fulfilled in the same way.

De-individuation. Identification with the group served to promote group solidarity by encouraging the members to see themselves only as group members. The suppression of autonomy and fostering of a sense of anonymity among sisters made this possible, the result of which has been characterized by one who experienced this process as the enforcement of a "deadly sameness" (Griffin, 1975:25). The traditional habit served to reduce individuality as well. Evidence of this sense of anonymity includes the omission of specific authors on any of their own publications. In addition, accounts of several of the nuns themselves bear this out. One sister recalled being required to play the piano for a musical she had directed behind a curtain so that noone could see her. She explained that this was to discourage the sin of pride or taking credit for the performance. It also enforced a sense of separation of the nun from the world and a sense of being anonymous. Many of the teaching sisters spoke of being assigned to schools in areas where they were unknown in order to diminish the possibility of someone having

known them as a lay person. The constant movement of sisters from one school to another also promoted a sense of interchangeability and sameness. (It might be said that the ethos of self-denial is a pre-industrial, pre-capitalistic one, an ethos that survived in religious orders rather than in business corporations or colleges. Self-assertiveness, individualism, and seeing the person as a monetary unit in a market economy have shaped a current world view that is the ideological opposite of convent culture.)

De-feminization, While the denial of personal needs, both emotional and physical, were in keeping with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, defeminization was more selective. The sisters were symbolically "de-feminized" in that they were assigned the names of male saints and some items, such as handkerchiefs, undershirts, shoes, and watches were male or imitated male styles (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:89). While the traditional habit (a modification of early medieval garb) helped to diminish individual personalities, it also served to diminish gender identification. Set apart as a holy person, the nun had hidden her sexuality behind yards of cloth so that she was thought of not so much as a holy "woman," but as a person set apart from both gender and all other secular statuses. However, while the biological and sexual aspects of women were downplayed, other more traditional features of womanhood were emphasized, such as

the importance of a lady-like demeanor, appropriate deportment, and proper manners -- that is, pre-industrial, feudal precepts.

We were never alone. But we could not take a drink of water in front of anyone. We were taught manners; being delicate young ladies is what we were supposed to be (Field Notes 6:78, 2/3/93).

You go to work and do your job and come home. You walked with your eyes down, your mouth closed, and your hands up your sleeves. You could get killed meditating. They always said nuns found all the money! (Field Notes 14:189, 8/4/93).

The socialization process worked towards the full identification of the person with the community. Once the trappings of former identity were discarded, a sense of emotional dependency could be fostered; in some sense, according to their own descriptions, sisters were reduced to children, dependent on the community for all of their needs. Role-reduction is a prerequisite for acquisition of a new identity (cf., Khleif, 1981:169). On the other hand, this strictness and regimentation were balanced by a sense of emotional security and specialness, of being anchored in a "Gemeinschaft." Few subjects spoke with anything but nostalgia and humor of some of their former customs and rules and many affirmed that they had a choice.

You felt guided and were made to feel special.. isolated from the world but in a caring way. Everything was right (Field Notes 1:4, 9/15/92).

I liked the structure...comfort of someone telling me what to do. I was a follower, not a leader (Field Notes 4:53, 10/19/92).

The young don't know what spiritual life is today; they think religious life is like a dungeon or something. It never was (Field Notes 11:163, 6/4/93).

By the time of final vows, sisters had been transformed into new persons. The traditional habit (change of status requires a change of dress; cf. college fraternities, hospital patienthood, weddings, baptisms -- Khleif, 1981:175) helped to reinforce in the minds of the sisters, as well as to outsiders, that she was indeed a full-fledged religious.

The overwhelming success of recruitment during the pre-Vatican II era allowed both systems to perform their primary tasks. The Sisters of Compassion were actively engaged in nursing and teaching in over-enrolled parochial schools. Sisters were placed in various assignments as the system required, often regardless of individual choice or talents, as reported earlier in Chapter V. The Solemnites continued to expand, building new monasteries throughout the first half of this century, bringing the power of prayer to several newly forming Catholic dioceses in the United States. The transformation function was operating well through the period leading up to Vatican II. The socialization process of sisters transformed them into new persons and the cloistered and semi-cloistered ways of life would insure a continuation and validation of the status of nun through the function of monitoring, a function internal to the system.

Monitoring

For the system to function well, it must have means of

monitoring itself and its members. While the transformation function teaches the vows to members, monitoring insures that they are kept. The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience might be considered the "creed" which sisters followed, while their rules and customs, carefully outlined and detailed, served as the "code" which dictated their daily lives. These rules which are learned during the socialization process were a form of monitoring the behavior, values, and beliefs of members (on "code" and "creed" of professions, cf. the writings of Everett C. Hughes).

According to Etzioni (1975:40-41), normative organizations require normative controls; that is the internalization of rules and customs. According to Galanter:

In a social system, monitoring is most easily implemented when a voluntary collaboration exists between those in control and those being managed, since outright coercion necessitates undue expenditure of resources and detracts from cooperative efforts to carry out the system's primary task (Galanter, 1989:105).

While the socialization process alters identity formation and promotes solidarity and consensus within the group, monitoring insures that this process remains stable, reinforcing beliefs and values over time. If members have identified fully with the group, often an unconscious process, then monitoring is more easily accepted and carried out. In fact, a sense of dependency fosters the expectation that one's actions will be supervised and

corrected when necessary. A system of rules, bolstered by dining rituals, penances and mortifications, was designed to uphold the basic values of the group. These rituals offered definition and structure, provided order and consistency to convent life, and continually upheld the dignity of the membership. The monitoring function also served to protect the system from outside influence.

Ours were lives of encasement, structures, prayers from rising until retiring. We were not allowed to walk into the city...to mail a letter without a companion (Field Notes 1:2, 9/15/92).

The rule of traveling in pairs or in groups may also have been a precaution against the action of hostile Protestant groups, a very real problem for sisters in the United States early in this century.

Sisters did not read newspapers, watch television, or discuss the problems of the world. Both incoming and outgoing mail was read and censored. One sister commented that "you could not even choose your own denial" (Field Notes 1:4, 9/15/92) meaning that acts of penance or humility were not yours to choose. She gave as an example of having her mail withheld until Easter Sunday as a penance.

...Someone in your family could have died and be long buried before you were told (Field Notes 1:6, 9/15/92).

Another sister spoke of her own sister's visits. She would collect obituaries and other newspaper articles and they would take them into the ladies' room in order to read them. Had they been sent in a letter they would have been

confiscated. Another sister spoke of her surprise at a Superior's comment regarding her sister's "unfortunate divorce" which had been discussed in a recent letter. Still another recalled being reprimanded for referring in a letter to her baking of altar bread as a "job" and was reminded that this was a "privilege." Still another reported that she was told to change the phrasing of a letter: after she had referred to "a bunch of people," she was informed that "only grapes and bananas came in bunches," and she had to rewrite the letter. Thus monitored, any correspondence coming from a nun had to be grammatically correct and literate, protecting the image of the religious which would reflect on the order itself.

Isolation from family members was difficult for many. Both active and contemplative sisters described incidents of sickness, family problems, and even death of family members that they were kept unaware of. Sisters always traveled with a companion, even to visit their families. At one time, however, they were not allowed to stay overnight or to eat at the same table.

One example of the degree of censorship within the system was that sisters were only allowed to read specified chapters in certain texts. One nun recalled a retreat where a priest asked them to read St. Augustine on "mortification." He used the example of Augustine not visiting his mother when passing by her home as an act of self-denial. Much later, this particular nun found out

that Augustine had brought illegitimate children into the world; when later allowed to read the whole book, she realized that the day he had passed by his mother's house she had long been deceased. She felt the priest had fabricated the entire story to use as an example, knowing they would never question it or know the difference. (Field Notes 4:58, 10/19/92).

Two examples of monitoring were the Chapter of Faults and "small leaves." The Chapter of Faults was a group ritual during which the sisters confessed openly any transgressions they may have had during the week (cf. the communist ideology of "criticism" and "self-criticism"). This would include breaking something, having unkind thoughts regarding someone, or breaching any of the rules. "Small leaves" required kneeling before the Mother Superior once a month to ask permission for things such as pencils, pins, needles, tape or anything of the community's which might be used by a sister. This was a reminder of the vow of poverty.

Recreation was also monitored. Inappropriate topics for discussion were carefully outlined in their rules. Sisters were not to discuss the financial situation of the community, any advice given them by a Superior, difficulties experienced with labor, fatigue, or temptations, problems with another sister, worldly amusements, or the faults of others (Archival Material SC4:23-24). As mentioned previously, problems experienced

by the sisters could only be discussed with the Mother Superior. A monitoring system also requires an administrative hierarchy, and within convents, it was the Mother Superior who bore most of the burden of this. Superiors were chosen by virtue of age and rank, but the office superseded the person; that is, once one's term was up, a superior became like all others, subject to the same rules, although the title of Mother was often retained (much like college deans in British universities, who are periodically elected).

Based on the accounts of the sisters, there appeared to be some comfort in some of these practices and nostalgia expressed among some in discussing them, similar to that of children who get together with brothers and sisters in later life to laugh about some of the rules and punishments of well-meaning parents. Some saw these as opportunities for penance and bestowal of grace not otherwise attainable; that is, in an enclosed environment such as this, what occasions of sin were available?

One of the sisters pointed out that these were more like "imperfections" than sins; penances were given in a spirit of compassion as well. There may have been comfort derived after punishment for a wrong, expiation of guilt, and a renewed acceptance and increased solidarity with the group. Some even indicated the benefits of constant reminders as something better than the indifference that followed after Vatican II. One of the respondents also

expressed the resolve it built up in people:

Some of our rules were old-fashioned and we laugh about those things, but they were to make us stronger people, and if you wanted to make a commitment for life, you had to be a strong person. If I were forced to defend my faith, I'm not sure I could do it. Those things were to strengthen our resolve. I didn't think so then, but maybe now the difference is it depends on you as an individual (Field Notes 14:184, 8/4/93).

The monitoring function served not only to keep the sisters in line but to protect the system itself -- the community -- and to promote solidarity within, a feeling of "we-ness" and of being part of a family interested in one's well being where members were cared for and shielded. Similar to some families where children take their grievances to parents, the sisters were encouraged to do likewise -- to report to their superiors and not to their contemporaries. As a function of the system, monitoring served to protect individual members as well as the convent community.

Those aspects of the transformation and monitoring functions of convents which focus respectively on the internal goals as well as the order of the system would succeed in preserving a way of life that was not disrupted until mid-century. Subsequent shocks to the system can be explained by exploring the function of feedback which began with good intentions, but resulted in the disruption of the status of Catholic sisters, the dismantling of the cloister for apostolic orders, and re-definition of some aspects of life in contemplative communities.

Feedback

The system uses the function of feedback in order to assess itself. The system must take in information in the form of both positive and negative feedback from the outside in relation to how it is perceived as an organization and how effective or ineffective it is in relation to its primary task. Feedback from the outside allows the system to accommodate itself to demands or to negotiate for or against change, protecting itself from possible threats. Without a sense of how it is perceived and accepted, the system has no way to protect itself or to make necessary changes to insure survival.

Since religious orders of women hold formal status within the Roman Catholic Church, feedback from the hierarchy is essential to its survival. Both the active and contemplative orders studied here have pontifical status, which means that their rules and constitutions are formally approved by the Vatican, yet many of their activities indicate that they have actual contact with local pastors and bishops. Feedback had previously been in relation to constitutions, rules, and regulations; that is, in the form of mandates from Rome, often through the local hierarchy. Information would be filtered down to members through their own superiors.

The feedback mechanism was to become intense during the decades leading up to Vatican II. For American sisters the changes that took place in mid-century were largely a

result of dialogue generated between the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the sisters themselves. In the 1940s a doctoral dissertation on the deficient professional preparation of teaching sisters was widely read and corroborated by a 1952 survey of American teaching sisters (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:45-51). In 1950, Pius XII called the First General Congress of the States of Perfection, an international gathering of heads of religious orders, with the idea of enlisting the help of the sisters to help transform society, a task that could only be possible if sisters were as professionally qualified as their secular counterparts. Credentialization became necessary and could not be achieved only through summer courses or short-term workshops as it had in the past. The Sister Formation Conference was established as a committee of the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) to promote higher education and training for sisters, integrating spiritual, intellectual, and professional curricula (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:6-11). Formation Directors and Superiors had to be re-trained in order to implement this, allowing for the first time close exchanges with peers from different orders -- rather than a one-way, isolated relationship with the top.

In addition, some of the rules and customs of religious orders were called into question, such as the traditional garb and class distinctions, such as the old categories of "choir" and "lay" sisters, within convents.

The Vatican encouraged formation of permanent associations and in August, 1952, the First National Congress of Religious of the USA met with two committees, one male and one female, in order to address internal changes with a view towards meeting the needs of modern society. In the Spring of 1956, the Vatican requested that the National Sisters Committee be permanent and on November 24, 1956, more than 235 heads of American communities voted to experiment with this for one year. This organization was called the Conference of Major Superiors of Women of the USA (CMSW) which later evolved into the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).

In 1961, Pope John XXIII appointed a commission to revise the code of canon law and sisters were asked for feedback. The intent was to bring the law into line with the teachings of Vatican II, which was to begin in 1962: sisters were asked to evaluate the law in terms of their experience (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:52-54). The Sisters' Surveys of 1966 to 1968 (which comprised 88% of the total membership) reflected the diversity as well as American cultural norms evident in convents. Many wanted participation in decision-making, 68.2% believed in God acting among the people rather than as a "transcendant other," and many believed in involvement in social justice projects for the common good as a form of religious commitment, rather than loyalty to clerical authority (Quinonez and Turner, 1992:45-47). Awareness of the

beliefs and values of other sisters, coupled with the Vatican's mandate for sisters to connect the vision of Vatican II to their missions, revealed the discrepancies between their vows and lifestyles and the needs of the wider society. A long process of assessment and trial and error ensued in convents across the country. Orders were given a ten-year period to submit their new constitutions for approval.

The difficulties of defining what religious life was supposed to mean after Vatican II was exacerbated by the statements of Vatican II with regard to religious orders. While some of these documents contain ambiguous passages with regard to all female orders, the experience of apostolic and contemplative orders, with regard to Vatican II mandates, ultimately diverge. This is explained hereunder.

The Gaudium et Spes (1965) (Happiness and Hope) emphasized the new philosophy of an active and responsive Church in the world, while the Lumen Gentium (1964) (A Light Unto the World) discusses the role of the hierarchy within the Church but leaves out any specific reference to religious orders of women, in effect ignoring their formal status as religious. In a separate chapter on the various forms of religious life, the following statement blurs the distinction between religious and lay states (perhaps as a concession or adaptation to increased secularization in the modern world):

From the point of view of the divine hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one's own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church (Lumen Gentium, November 21, 1964, paragraph 43:3).

The Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the Religious Life (1965) called for modifications in all forms of religious life, including the elimination of outmoded customs and a return to the gospels. While specific guidelines for these changes are not provided for apostolic orders, Paragraph 16 of this document refers to both, but is more specific with regard to the contemplatives, stating:

Papal cloister should be maintained in the case of nuns engaged exclusively in the contemplative life. However, it must be adjusted to conditions of time and place and obsolete practices suppressed. This should be done after due consultation with the monasteries in question. But other nuns applied by rule to apostolic work outside the convent should be exempted from papal cloister in order to enable them better to fulfill the apostolic duties entrusted to them. Nevertheless cloister is to be maintained according to the prescriptions of their constitutions. (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the Religious Life, October 28, 1965, paragraph 16).

This last statement leaves open the question as to how much of the cloister would be retained for individual apostolic orders. All of these documents, taken together, pointed to the need for collaborative efforts on the part of all religious orders of women.

The case of the contemplative sisters bears special mention with regard to this last point. In 1950, Pope Pius

XII had called for religious orders to form federations. Many of the contemplative sisters did not wish to do so, feeling that this was a form of modernity that was threatening to their vocation (Weaver, 1986:102). By 1965, they too were called upon to begin a process of renewal, which some felt would require collaboration and discussion with other orders. In the wake of this confusion, a group of contemplative sisters attended a meeting of the CMSW (Conference of Major Superiors of Women) in 1965. They were then asked by their apostolic delegate to attend no more of these meetings. They met themselves in 1966 and requested of the Bishops' Commission, headed by Cardinal Carberry of St. Louis, that an association for contemplative nuns be formed. A major meeting was planned for the summer of 1969 in Woodstock, Maryland. Carberry wrote to the monasteries asking the nuns not to attend. In May of that year, a questionnaire was sent out by Carberry to contemplatives requesting input on their hopes for renewal. Before these could be processed, however, the Venite Seorsum (Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns) of August 15, 1969 was published with detailed instructions on the norms regulating enclosure, including a statement to the effect that "meetings and conventions of any kind can hardly be reconciled with the cloistered life and are to be prudently avoided" (Venite Seorsum, 1965:Section VII:12). If deemed as necessary and beneficial to the orders, meetings could

be held only with authorized permission.

Led by a group of progressive Carmelites, the Association for Contemplative Sisters was founded anyway, but was never formally recognized by Rome. Today it functions more as a forum of exchange and less as a political body (Weaver, 1986:102-105). There appears to be little collaboration between contemplative orders; in addition, they are subject to strict scrutiny by the hierarchy, in keeping with the Vatican's regulation on this, which is as follows:

During the canonical visitation, whereas the Visitor must inspect the material cloister, the Superior is to report to him on the observance of the cloister prescriptions, presenting for his examination the book in which must be faithfully recorded all the instances of entering and leaving the enclosure (Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns, August 15, 1969: Section VII:15)

In summary, we can say that it was the mechanism of open feedback that forced religious orders to scrutinize themselves and to begin the process of change. The shift from mandates to open exchange created a new dialogue which began with positive purpose, but ultimately put the apostolic sisters in a precarious position in that their status and identity were called into question. Instructions for monastic orders were relatively specific and the form of feedback upheld the previous tradition of one-way dialogue from the Vatican. In contrast, the instructions for apostolic orders were far more ambiguous, creating issues that have yet to be resolved. Feedback

from both types of orders had been requested by the Vatican and each had set about discussing the process of renewal, but the patterns of dialogue began to diverge, with different consequences. Apostolic sisters now have an extensive political organization in the form of the LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious), of which the Sisters of Compassion are active members. More democratic features within the order allow for open exchange of information to all members. The Association for Contemplative Sisters, on the other hand, serves more as a support group than a political body and is not as inclusive. The Solemnites, for example, have virtually no contact with the ACS; instead, they retain a more familial relationship with the hierarchy and information is still filtered down to the membership through the authority structure of the convent community. The function of feedback should create a dialogue that helps to maintain the organization; however, in this case, communication patterns between the Vatican and apostolic orders was fraught with tensions, the contemplatives thus retaining a more traditional form of contact with the hierarchy.

Boundary Maintenance

In addition to feedback from the outside, the successful system must maintain a balance between autonomy and acceptance, retain its distinctiveness, yet also a certain uniformity with the outside world. We have seen how the socialization and monitoring of sisters served to

enforce separation between the nun and the world. On the other hand, their status as female religious afforded them institutionalized protection and legitimation within the Catholic Church. We have also seen how feedback from the Catholic hierarchy began to affect the existing structures of Catholic convents; that is, the boundaries between the nun and the world began to shatter, jeopardizing their relationship with the Catholic Church. Changes in work, dress, and values often resulted in clashes with the formal hierarchy.

Work: Historically the principle of enclosure was not as stringent for working nuns, but cloistral regulations for these communities served to demarcate them from the world at large. Working nuns were encouraged to limit contact with seculars, to maintain distance from students and patients, and were periodically transferred to different locations to shield them from forming social relationships (much like overseas diplomats being periodically shifted around). The new work tasks of active sisters brought them into contact with the secular world. Once involved in social services and the development of religious education programs, which required night work and coordination with other Church officials, the sisters could no longer maintain a cloistered existence. The mandate for higher education has been cited as a primary factor in the exposure of the nun to modern values. Credentialization and professionalization in education and health-care

required contact with the secular world. Exposure to new ideas has led to the questioning of old taken-for-granted values, a factor that has not affected the contemplative orders as much as the active orders.

The Habit: Perhaps one of the most important facilitators of social distance was the traditional habit which covered all but the face and hands. As a symbol to others of how one was related to, spoken to, and regarded, the habit provided anonymity, demarcation of status within convents, and differentiation from outsiders. It also served to symbolize the organization itself, to reinforce it as something distinct, a special entity removed from, yet secure within, its environment. With the modification, and subsequent virtual elimination, of the religious habit, active sisters lost a powerful symbol of social distance, a symbol that had been particularly important for those coming into contact with lay people.

Americanization: Convents also represented the culture of the Church, often infused with old world ethnic cultural values as well. The Americanization of Catholic nuns (e.g., a growing sense of individuality) no doubt created conflicts within some convents. While acceptance of nuns by American society did not come easily historically, eventually they had proven themselves in education and health care. Their contributions may have been deemed valuable, while their "Old World" customs may have been

merely tolerated. Once the children of American immigrants entered convents, however, change was in the air. Value clashes were evident in many of the interview statements of the nuns with regard to obedience, loss of individuality, and constant surveillance by superiors. It also became very difficult for teaching sisters to motivate students to individual achievements, to teach competitiveness, and to emphasize the dignity of the individual when they themselves were living under different rules. With regard to contemplative nuns, the Mother Superior of the Solemnites, indicated that American nuns did not adhere to the caste system evident in convents before Vatican II. With regard to this, she stated:

Equality is ingrained in us as Americans.
Eliteness does not apply here (Field Notes 15:200,
10/18/93).

While the constitutions and rules of religious orders were fairly uniform, since they required approval from the Holy See, there were distinctive cultural influences within convents as well. Each individual order had its own history, goals, saints, role models, ethnic backgrounds, traditional garb, and other features that differentiated it and added to a sense of distinctiveness between orders (cf. military regiments, their history and flags). Before Vatican II there was little contact between religious orders: some of these barriers were effectively broken by the mandate from Rome for collaboration and dialogue, not only within, but between religious orders of women. Today

many active orders are represented by the Leadership Conference of Religious Women. The current shortage of female religious has also resulted in inter-community living, whereby members of different orders now live together in convents which are convenient to their particular jobs. While many of the distinguishing features of religious orders may remain today, the overriding influence of common American values has brought them closer together. In summary, boundaries for apostolic orders have now been blurred by the removal of former barriers which separated the nun from the world at large. However, the contemplatives have retained more of their former mechanisms of boundary control, as will be discussed below. The extent to which the functions of transformation, monitoring, feedback, and boundary control have continued to operate will determine the continued stability of the social system. What follows is a comparison of the ways in which the functions of each system have been altered since Vatican II, illustrating the relative impact of change on each order.

The Altered Systems

Transformation: Considering the primary tasks of each order, it can be said that while the broader goals of the Sisters of Compassion have not changed, some of their work tasks have. In a sense, many of their original goals have been attained -- that is, the education of Catholic immigrant groups and their acceptance into mainstream

America. Small immigrant communities which often revolved around the parish and parochial school are not as prevalent today. Secondly, spiritual fulfillment, formerly satisfied by religion in general, may have been displaced by the rise of psychology in modern post-industrial society. Thirdly, the expansion of government into areas of education, health care, and social services may have taken over many of the functions of apostolic orders. The Sisters of Compassion are an example of this in that once primarily teachers and nurses, they have now moved into social-service fields and religious instruction in parishes. In addition, individual talents and preferences are increasingly taken into account, rather than enforcing mandated job assignments required by the system.

While some of the daily work tasks of the Solemnites have changed, their primary task of promoting spirituality is on-going, and in a sense, never fully accomplished. Rather than baking altar breads and making vestments, they are engaged in art work, making and selling religious articles, and doing solicitation work for the diocese. They continue to live by alms and all activities are subordinate to their primary task.

The secondary goal of recruitment and training has been essentially eliminated for the Sisters of Compassion who have not had a vocation in 12 years. Without new members, the process of transmitting and reinforcing groupness has become obsolete; rather, they evidence a

process of identity creation in a transitional time, an issue to be addressed in the next chapter. The Solemnites have managed to maintain their numbers in recent years. Training is less rigid, however, and the time period between entering and final vows has been extended, in order that entrants are certain of their commitment. Many of the old rules and customs have been abandoned for both orders, but more have been retained for the contemplatives. Postulants and novices now associate with professed sisters; that is, the former rigidity of rites of passage which served to elevate the final status of the professed nun has been muted and the final ceremony less ornate. There appears to be a close-knit and maternal style of guiding the new entrants and they continue to develop new programs to train young sisters.

While the former caste system evident in both orders has been eliminated, the Solemnites continue to differentiate between sisters on the basis of age and rank, while the Sisters of Compassion appear to be more interdependent but not as interchangeable nor anonymous as they were in the past. They have dropped the traditional habit and have adopted a variety of clothing styles, allowing for preference of members. The Solemnites retain their modified, but uniform, garb.

Monitoring: Over time, aspects of the monitoring function changed drastically for the Sisters of Compassion. Many of the sisters now associate these practices with humor and

describe how they have changed gradually. For example, the television might be turned on after the superior went to bed -- as some superiors would not object. Another superior would merely slit open the envelopes of incoming letters without reading them as a reminder of "token censorship," because it had become repugnant to her to invade the privacy of others. Group prayer and common meals are still important parts of convent life but no longer mandatory and often impossible due to work schedules, commitments in the outside world, and new living arrangements. Group ritual today serves as a needed link to revitalize the sisters for their work outside, rather than a means of monitoring behavior.

For the Solemnites, however, monitoring has continued in a somewhat altered form. Schedules are adhered to and while some of the austerities and mortifications have been abandoned, obedience and sacrifice are expected. The rule of enclosure still holds but it has become necessary for nuns to leave the cloister for medical and other reasons; the need for extern sisters to drive indicates that there is more contact than previously with the outside world. Sisters are now allowed to visit their families more often. Penances are not inflicted as they once were and there is more concern about the health of sisters, particularly since many are aging. They do not rise at midnight any longer for prayers. Yet in comparison to the Sisters of Compassion, the Solemnites retain much closer control over

their members, the most obvious advantage for them being physical seclusion of the entire community. Reading material continues to be censored, as is television programming and any contact with outsiders. In addition, the sisters themselves are monitored periodically by officials of the hierarchy.

Feedback: A more open and reciprocal exchange of information has characterized communications between the Vatican and sisters after Vatican II. However, collaboration among sisters has opened up a network of organizations which in some sense has politicized many nuns. There have been many clashes between the hierarchy and the sisters on issues of work and lifestyle since Vatican II, many of these cases being supported by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (cf., for example, Griffin, 1975; Quinonez and Turner, 1992; Turk, 1971; Violet, 1988; Weaver, 1986). While the Sisters of Compassion are active members of the LCWR, the Solemnites have virtually no contact with their counterpart, the ACS, a group which they consider to be "too liberal" for their taste. Instead, they appear to retain a more familial relationship with the hierarchy and continue to accept their feedback through the traditional channels. Information is filtered down to the membership as deemed appropriate by the Mother Superior.

Boundary Maintenance: There is no question that boundaries

have been blurred for the Sisters of Compassion. The loss of the traditional habit, as well as work opportunities and living arrangements which bring them into unprecedented contact with the outside world, have removed former status barriers. The distinction between orders has become less demarcating as inter-community living has replaced the former self-contained convents of individual orders. The former autonomy that active nuns enjoyed as administrators and superiors has diminished in that many sisters now answer to parish priests or bishops who employ them to do specific jobs in parishes or dioceses. The Sisters of Compassion have lost some of the protection of their individual community. They have responded to this by forming a new institute combining all regional branches, adopting the more secular democratic decision-making procedures evident in the larger society; however, as a system, the Sisters of Compassion have moved towards the periphery of the institution, as both financial and personal resources dwindle.

The Solemnites have managed to retain many of their traditional boundaries. The sisters wear a full habit and adhere to the rules of enclosure, despite the fact that these have altered somewhat. (The difficulties in getting information from them, especially numbers, attests to this. As a visitor to the cloister, I experienced many instances of traveling beyond locked doors and talking to people through grates, which demonstrates distance as a stark

reality.) While American norms have entered the cloister, they appear to have been filtered through convent culture; for example, while the notion of equality was mentioned as inconsistent with former eliteness within the Solemnite community, equality is also interpreted as consistent with sameness, reinforcing the old rule of deindividuation.

Not only have the Solemnites retained distance from the secular world, including mainstream values, but they also exhibit a certain amount of autonomy in their own diocese. For example, the Mother Superior explained that she had been asked by the local bishop to solicit funds for future vocations in the priesthood. She agreed, with the stipulation that this kind of work did not interfere with their way of life. The nuns devised a program of advertising through Catholic periodicals and by telephone to accomplish this and were very successful. She also made the decision to discontinue retreats for teenagers for the diocese when her nuns decided they were not equipped to handle questions about sexuality. In both cases, it appears that the nuns felt that they could be assertive about what kinds of work they would undertake, reaffirming their identities as a certain type of religious, perhaps because their lifestyle is officially sanctioned and respected within the Church.

This chapter has compared the apostolic and

contemplative orders by examining them as systems within the Roman Catholic Church. A comparison of the two systems in terms of the functions of transformation, monitoring, feedback, and boundary control show that the Solemnites have retained a much more secure position as a functioning organization within the Roman Catholic Church. While organizational change has had an effect on both communities, the dismantling of the cloister for active orders has threatened their traditional status as female religious in the 1990s. We turn now to the more micro-level phenomenon of "emergent status-reconstruction" --that is, the ways in which the nuns in apostolic orders are adapting to organizational change.

CHAPTER VIII

AGING IN A DYING COMMUNITY: EMERGENT STATUS-RECONSTRUCTION

By comparing the apostolic and contemplative orders as social systems, we can better comprehend the relative precariousness of the position of the active order. To the extent that these findings can be generalized to other apostolic orders, we can say, *mutatis mutandis*, that their members would also be experiencing similar effects of organizational change, a topic taken up hereunder.

This chapter is based on interviews with 33 members of 4 active communities. In addition to my 23 interviews with the Sisters of Compassion, I also spoke with 10 members of 3 other active orders in the diocese (4 from one order and 3 from the 2 others). They shared many similar experiences with the Sisters of Compassion and express many of the same concerns about their present roles as religious. This chapter explores the effects of organizational decline on the consciousness of members of these communities, including the reactions of sisters to these changes and the ways in which they are reconstructing their roles as female religious, including new perceptions of work, adaptation to secular dress, maintaining a sense of community, sustaining rituals and symbols, an emphasis on history, reclamation of the

gospels, and a renewal of their commitment to their vows and to Christianity. These strategies are enacted against the backdrop of an acknowledged sense of "time running out" -- for themselves and for their communities.

Female Religious Symbols

The symbolic world of women religious was constructed around a basic set of principles: piety, seclusion, and community. These principles corresponded with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and the code of behavior which accompanied them. To best live out these vows, the basic principle of separation or flight from the world was consistent with the special emphasis on enclosure for female religious; that is, separation, coupled with the symbols of piety and communal solidarity, set the tone for all forms of living, including daily ritual and the integration of work tasks. These basic cultural assumptions were supported by specific symbols and ritual; hence, when these assumptions were called into question, followed by the dismantling of the cloister, a process of symbol deconstruction began to take place. Ritual, which had served to support and reinforce the accepted ideology, became ineffectual. This presented a dilemma for nuns who were socialized into a culture which had deeply shaped their personal identities in that their symbolic supports had collapsed.

While the overwhelming response of sisters to the

mandates of Vatican II was positive, many expressed mixed feelings and some sorrow at the loss of some of their former symbols. While deemphasis on the vow of obedience was in some sense liberating for sisters, it was disorienting as well. In my interpretation of how the nuns are reconstructing their roles as religious, several key aspects emerged from the data, including new perceptions of work, adaptation to secular dress, maintaining a spirit of community, sustaining rituals and symbols, an emphasis on history, reclamation of the gospels, and a renewed commitment to their vows and to Christianity.

Work: From Mission to Identity

In contrast to pre-Vatican II days when work was considered "mission," and less attention paid to matching individual desires or talents with available jobs, work in the post-Vatican II era allowed more personal choice. More and more nuns would work in the outside world, in many cases for other organizations and businesses. Networks expanded, individual talents were taken into account, and freedom to choose a ministry became more prevalent. It is worth repeating here the words of one sister:

We went from a schedule of prayer and a priority of education and hospitals to a freer expression of the person...what the person wants to do in ministry (Field Notes 3:37, 9/30/92).

This would mean more contact with lay people as sisters

would attend professional conferences and deal directly with seculars at work. Whereas many nuns previously held teaching and administrative positions, many more now worked under parish priests as religious education teachers and in social service programs affiliated with parishes. Of the 33 active sisters, all had spent time in teaching or as educational administrators; today, of those working, 4 are elementary school teachers, 2 are college level teachers, 1 is a principal, 3 are involved in religious instruction, and 10 are in social work such as outreach programs for the elderly, working in soup kitchens, and counseling Aids victims, battered women, and single mothers. Overwhelmingly, the sisters expressed great joy in the kinds of work in which they are involved today. The following are statements from sisters in answer to the question of how they feel about their work:

My life was like a stream to a river to the ocean
...total outreach (Field Notes 1:14, 9/15/92).

You go with the time..we did what we could for the times but for all of us in religious life, life is an ongoing process of change. When you can see someone doing better, feeling stronger because you've been able to help, it is so much more rewarding (Field Notes 3:41, 9/30/92).

We used to call it that (mission). Today we call it ministry because that's what I'm doing... ministering to the people. I've had so many faith experiences; pastoral work is so fruitful that way. When you journey with a person through the sickness you are with them to the end, the wake, the funeral. I have had some beautiful enriching faith experiences (Field Notes 8:121, 4/26/93).

Yes, it's really much better because you get to pick

what you are really called to do..now it comes from inside. You're a freer person because you're doing what you were really called to do and you can blossom more (Field Notes 7:114, 3/12/93).

We are more connected. In the beginning for me you felt chopped off like...now you can really be part of the parish. You're freer and more a part of things (Field Notes 29:281, 2/9/94).

And the following from a sister now teaching in an urban community:

This is a continuum if you will. You go with the flow or you die. This is what the sisters were. You bloom where you're planted so to speak. I'm doing my duty by God and man because I'm the only nun here. _____ says this is the magic word "sister," the most trusted one by all factions. We consider ourselves really blessed. We are living under God's grace. You can be given the grace and reject it. We accept it and work with it (Field Notes 22:296, 12/31/93).

The sister quoted above spoke with reference to another sister, a former teacher, now working with Aids patients:

Whatever your call is you answer. And the dear people she is living with, working with, dying with, has been a special blessing. This is her latest charism -- to reach out to those most in need today (Field Notes 22:297-298, 12/13/93).

And finally from a sister working with poor families:

This is what is here and this is now and maybe we can make things a bit better. Are we meeting the needs of the poor? HUD is hoping this whole area will be built up and people will feel better about themselves. Further north we have people working in very poor parishes and they don't get salaries. Our community supports them and they are so happy up there because they all have to work together (Field Notes 23:321, 1/6/94).

These statements indicate that many feel their current work is still part of their "calling." Some of the sisters have indicated that they have changed their occupations and gone into fields that they had always

wanted to pursue, mainly sisters who preferred pastoral work to teaching. For those in teaching and administrative positions, there is a down-side to this; it is now up to the sisters to find work and to contribute financially to their communities. They must apply and interview for positions both in and outside of the institution. One of the major factors affecting their work is the financial problems of individual communities. By 1981 only 4 percent of the total membership were in the formation (training) stage and 38 percent of sisters were over the age of 65 (Neal, 1984:19). This trend has continued into the 90s. The orders studied here have had only sporadic vocations over the past five years. This means that there are fewer younger sisters to support elderly members, putting pressure on working sisters to bring in higher incomes. Those few women who are entering must have a Bachelor's degree or some experience in the work world. This may cause differentiation of status within communities. One older nun who supplements her income by babysitting said she felt uncomfortable talking about her work with the other sisters who had professional jobs. It may be that the sisters now tend to view each other more in terms of their careers (indicative of the industrialization of convents and the nun's work). As with lay women, work may have become a more integral part of their identities, but for those thrust out into the competitive job market

in a time of economic insecurity for communities, the need for extrinsic rewards -- i.e., worldly or non-spiritual -- may become more prevalent. The work of the nun had been analagous to the invisible work (cf., for example, Daniels, 1987; Wichroski, 1994) performed by many women in that it was done out of love and not for money, that is, not part of the cash nexus. To some degree this is still the case. Sisters still turn over their salaries to their communities and are paid a stipend to live on, but the trend towards emphasis on efficiency and market value for work may be affecting nuns just as it has secular women. Work for monetary gain or as a source of pride is not conducive to the code of humility and service required of the religious life. The view of work as paid labor contradicts the original meaning of their vocations. The sisters now refer to their work as "charism," which means the particular ideology that the work represents, the specific goal of their individual orders, and the "gift" of being able to carry this out. Despite this reference to what was once "mission," and their apparent satisfaction with the kinds of work they are doing now, there is evidence that the sisters have been forced out of economic necessity to view occupations in a way very similar to that of the secular world, that is, in terms of professional credentials and market value. Although few sisters spoke of fear of retirement, two of the soon-to-be retired

sisters mentioned anxiety about their living arrangements and being viewed as non-productive.

While for some, vocation may come to be viewed in more occupationally-based terms, domestic tasks, once relegated to certain members, are now shared collectively. This shift has occurred by necessity as they no longer have the numbers required, nor the close-knit living arrangements in some cases, to designate in-house tasks. This more egalitarian system is analogous to what has taken place in secular households where both adults are more likely to be in the paid labor force and are then compelled by necessity to share housework and childcare. While economic forces may have affected the occupational world of sisters, their individual missions, whatever they may be, have become important to them as a source of personal identity and satisfaction.

The Habit

Perhaps the most important differentiator for nuns was the traditional habit. The Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the Religious Life stated the following:

The religious habit, an outward mark of consecration to God, should be simple and modest, poor and at the same time becoming. In addition it must meet the requirements of health and be suited to the circumstances of time and place and to the needs of the ministry involved. The habits of both men and women Religious which do not conform to these norms must be changed (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the Religious Life, 1965:paragraph 17).

The ambiguity of the above statement would present problems for sisters in trying to adapt their style of

dress. No real guidelines were provided, which explains why many nuns were subject to reprimands from the clergy while trying to accommodate themselves to this change. Three of the women in this sample still wear the full habit and several wear a modified one. At one gathering of a community, I observed a continuum of dress from the full habit to secular dress, with many variations in between. The vast majority have adopted secular dress, but all of these remembered distinctly the particular events and circumstances surrounding the shedding of this powerful symbol (cf. an Indian woman shedding her "sari" for a Western dress; a Sikh man, shedding his turban; or a traditional Amish woman cutting her long hair for the first time). Here are some of their reactions:

It was a matter of respect and pride..but one should be respected regardless of dress. I could best do what I had to do without it (the habit) (Field Notes 1:10-11, 9/15/92).

They couldn't shield us any longer. We were of the world but not in it (Field Notes 2:21, 9/23/92).

I remember thinking we've got to change this. Going out into the world, working with people, doing physical work in a hot climate were reasons enough. I loved it dearly but the yards of cloth just house the same person (Field Notes 3:39, 9/30/92).

Habits were not practicable any longer (Field Notes 19:235, 12/19/93).

I remember we were told to cut our habits off, to shorten them and we wore a white blouse and vest; the modified habit with a veil. I cried my eyes out. They told us we were going to go through a lot..facing lots of adjustments but I found this very difficult (Field Notes 8:113, 4/26/93).

Habits were terrible in summer..they always killed us, but there was security in the clothes and

respect for the habit because it stood for a particular thing. Someone said once "I wouldn't have sworn if you had the habit on" and I say, "you shouldn't be swearing in the first place!" (Field Notes 14:181, 8/4/93).

You put that on (the traditional habit) and you had a feeling...a great feeling of warmth. (Field Notes 16:208, 10/19/93).

You might say that we have lost a bit of respect from the laity. We have always been looked up to and I don't say that in a high and mighty way but what sister said was law. That is what we believed. But I think losing the habit we've lost a certain amount of respect and in this way we have taken away a bit of the religious aspect. But we are still a marvelous community (Field Notes 6:78, 2/3/93).

We lost religious garb by default. If the Church said to me "remove it," but the Church didn't say that. The individual orders did; individuals, not the Church. You see, it starts small and then there is a natural progression (Field Notes 7:98, 3/12/93).

And this from a nun who has retained her habit:

I guess my feeling is if you have to drop the habit to do the apostolate, then maybe you best quit the apostolate. If there is some task that requires it, okay, but the rule should be: am I recognized as a sister? It allows me to be a witness. People know God exists. I am a reminder. Some people like it and some laugh at us (Field Notes 31:442, 2/20/94).

While the modern nun in habit is in the minority, most expressed great love for their habits but saw the necessity for dropping them in order to do their work and to be able to interact professionally in the secular world. Some indicated that they felt they were still identifiable: "we're not exactly fashion-plates" (Field Notes 2:22, 9/23/92) and because they often travel in groups. Some said the negative reactions of others were difficult, yet understandable, because the habit was such a powerful and nostalgic symbol for many Catholics.

Maintaining Community

Several of the nuns expressed the desire to live in community as one of the major appeals of convent life. After Vatican II, as a result of the elimination of cloistral regulations, and the exodus of many women from religious orders, communities became smaller and many nuns now live in apartments and houses rather than convents. In this sample, 20 sisters live in convents, 8 live in rented houses together (2 groups of 4 each), 2 share an apartment, and 3 live alone. The loss of community was a concern to many of the nuns interviewed because of the loss of friendships and closeness and also because of concerns about retirement since there are fewer young nuns to support the elderly.

There isn't the depth of our life that we had when we were a community...we are so diverse.. different jobs with different hours. I miss not spending more time together and doing together things...we are all doing our own thing now (Field Notes 4:56-57, 10/19/92).

We do have meetings and prayer services but it's not the same as having the community. I myself miss my community because I am not with them enough to know how they are faring (Field Notes 2:10, 9/23/92).

Prayer life is the support of community life. We need common prayers. You're less likely to do it if you're alone. And I don't mean hanging your hat in the same place (Field Notes 7:98, 3/12/93).

Despite the lack of community structures, many of the sisters spoke of a "deeper spirituality" and feelings of closeness among the sisters who remain.

It is deeper and much more prayerful for me... not obligatory. You can still pray as a group

which is important. It's a better feeling (Field Notes 2:31, 9/23/92).

We are independent persons now but the link of spirituality is strong (Field Notes 3:38, 9/30/92).

I'm more of an individual now and those things such as reciting the office become your responsibility. You're not just doing it because everyone else is (Field Notes 8:117, 4/26/93).

I make my own spiritual life. We do pray together as a group, usually once a week. You can't lose that means to get love. We check on those in the area and meet with them or call and ask "are you okay? Did you eat today? Sister ___ always says "God will provide." Some days I want to say "Baloney - I am providing (Field Notes 16:208, 10/19/93).

The trend appears to be that women from different orders live together in convents, which they call "inter-community living," something unheard of in the past. Others live in small groups or on their own. In response to the question of whether she would ever consider living in an apartment, one nun replied:

I'd rather bang on the Motherhouse doors than do that (Field Notes 5:70, 1/19/93).

Attempts to keep the communities together include periodic celebrations of special feast days and those commemorating historical events of their order. One of the largest orders in the diocese has recently formed an institute that combines all regional provinces into one organization. This was an attempt to consolidate the membership, to facilitate communication and networking, allowing sisters to work in different regions where there are job openings. This allows the community to maintain

some authority and protection for the sisters, many of whom are working under pastors or diocesan bishops. In this case, tape recordings of conferences and celebrations were sent out to older sisters who were not able to attend in order to keep them informed and included in the latest developments of their community.

Resurrecting History

When former ideologies have weakened, changing the priorities and structures of a way of life, new ideologies must arise or old ones be resurrected to legitimate new roles. The current life and work of the nun is legitimated by the aims and missions of their particular orders, aims and missions which have been renewed in intensity. Since Vatican II, many new histories and writings of foundresses (the words founder and foundress are gender-specific; many orders had male co-founders and in some cases were extensions of male religious orders), as well as the experiences of the early sisters, have been published (cf. third-generation Americans establishing "historical societies"). This is a source of great pride for the sisters. One of the post-Vatican II biographies of one order's foundress included the following:

In the matter of governing her rapidly-growing congregation Mother_____ was all that a superior should be according to the norms of Vatican II" (Archival Materials SC4, 1978:89).

This statement reflects the linkage of old ideologies with the new vision of Vatican II. Many said they felt the

work they were doing today was simply a continuation of what they had always done; that is, their work is consistent with the original goals of their foundresses.

You can have changes in society but still keep the basic principles of your order (Field Notes 5:70, 1/19/93).

These goals are perceived as more important than a life of enclosure and piety behind convent walls. Other sisters made the point that the needs of people change over time and new social problems arise that require a different type of ministry. Single parenthood, Aids, alcoholism, and homelessness are new issues, but require the same kinds of tending that the poor and ill have always required. Yet people cannot be helped unless the sisters are actively engaged in the real world. One sister stressed that their mission had always been to help the poor, particularly women, and that since its founding her order had met the "needs of the time." In the early years, this meant work related to education, the poor, and the sick. In New England, because of large numbers of immigrants, the need for education was strong. During the Civil War (1861-1865), the major need was for hospitals. The transformation after Vatican II, as well as demographic changes, resulted in the closing of many Catholic schools; sisters began working in fields more directly related to social service. One sister cited the plight of single women as a priority of both past and present:

So many jobs fall within the lines of our goal..we have a broad philosophy but the thrust is women...always has been. We must educate and strengthen them in their own womanhood (Field Notes 3:35-36, 9/30/92).

Another made reference to the founder of her order as an inspiration to her current work with the elderly:

This is a fuller concept of life. Our founder wanted us to do it with zest, with zeal, getting in touch with things and to do it joyfully (Field Notes 8:116, 4/26/93).

Two of the sisters reported on their recent trip to Ireland to visit the Motherhouse of their foundress who was known for her assistance to poor women. The sisters look back to their founders and foundresses as a role models and justification for the continuity of their present work.

Another nun spoke of the Jesuit philosophy on which her order was founded. When asked if she had considered this upon entering she replied:

Not at all; these were the nuns I knew. How many things are thought out at age 19? (Field Notes 7:102, 3/12/93).

Yet today she is very proud of the Jesuit heritage and anxious to share some of the traditions and history of the order. Although none of the sisters reported joining a particular order because of its history, it is very important to them today as a source of identity maintenance and legitimation for their current work. Frequent references to the gospels, to the life and intentions of Jesus, and to their original vows were also noted. Some of the sisters referred to specific passages

in scripture with regard to their goals and used statements attributed to Jesus as guides. One sister remarked:

We need to be open enough to know that God said to serve my people and spread my word. He didn't say how to do it. He just said do it. Christ said certain things and later we got into man-made structures (Field Notes 14:191, 8/4/93).

When asked to describe her current goals, another sister replied: "To live the gospel radically!" (Field Notes 1:16, 9/15/92).

Sustaining Rituals and Symbols

In the past, formalized structure had upheld the ideology of religious life, including standardized rituals and symbols. Due to different living arrangements and work demands, the obligatory ritual cannot be sustained. While this new type of solidarity requires more inner controls than outer sanctions, many of the sisters, as already mentioned, describe a better and more enriching sense of their own spirituality; yet they also miss their communitites. Group prayers and meal rituals are used which still contain elements of the past and those living separately indicated that they look forward to group meetings and prayers (that is, as validation of identity) whenever it is possible. However, the absence of formal structures has meant that some of these women are creative in reproducing ritual for themselves. One example is a nun who lives alone, still doing parish work for the elderly at the age of 81. She took great pride in showing

me a shrine she had built to the Virgin Mary in her fireplace. She commented that she very much needed and missed the structure of former convent life. She continues to wear the full habit, and said that she has learned from the elderly parishioners she serves how to sustain her faith. She seems to create her own rituals, such as doing the Stations of the Cross in her bedroom, and devoting another room in her apartment to memorabilia she is collecting from the Holy Land. She continues to see other sisters from her order for special meetings and social gatherings but very much misses the old community.

Four sisters living together in a rented house have converted their livingroom into a chapel, complete with a pulpit and pews. Although they attend Mass at a nearby Church, they use their chapel to pray together on a daily basis. A group of eight sisters from two different orders living together in a convent have set aside special times for prayer for members of the same orders and other times for common prayer with everyone, as well as special celebrations for birthdays and holy days. They create their own "Gemeinschaft." The innovation these women show in maintaining some of the symbols and ritual of their status seems to indicate how important these symbols are to their present roles.

The sisters retain a sense of continuity, of history, of commitment to their communities, and to Christianity. These women appear to be restructuring their own lives in

the absence of former institutional supports by drawing from their earlier formative training a sense of self-discipline and fortitude. Their status continues to give them a certain insulation and privilege as a group, but the former trappings supporting the status of nun have been replaced by a renewed emphasis on their foundresses, the gospel, and their original vows, bolstering their renewed sense of commitment. All of these tend to bypass proclamations about faith in the institution as a hierarchical authority structure, although there seems to be general acknowledgement that the Church would outlast any particular group or institutional arrangements, including their own communities (the Catholic Church is the most continuous, oldest institution in the Western world; the Japanese throne, the oldest in the Eastern world). Rather, they appear to be committed to the original intentions of Jesus and to the work they continue to do in His name.

Aging in a Dying Community

The ability of persons to use their capacities to think out and form options for creative action is evident in some of the strategies for living adopted by Catholic nuns. Despite the efforts described above, there is little doubt that most apostolic communities are in a state of organizational decline. One of the clear indications of decline has been the overall aging of this population. Although many nuns work well over the age of

65, the majority today are either in, or moving towards, retirement. Other reported effects on members of declining organizations include increased stress, low morale, and interpersonal conflict (Whetten, 1980:368-369). Ebaugh (1993:38-39) found that the nuns in her study tended to accept the fact that their organization was dying and that they were trying to focus on the future of their goals regardless of whether their order survived. The nuns in this sample expressed similar sentiments. There was little evidence of low morale among these women, but rather hope for the future and a sense of humor about themselves and their predicament. None have expressed any regrets about their lives as religious (nor would one expect them to); yet one senses their striving for cognitive consistency in that they seem to be trying to reconcile what is past with what is present. Some of the strategies discussed above point to this: their goal is finding a sense of continuity.

There is yet another dimension to their dilemmas. In a way, aging in a community that is itself aging may be a source of bittersweet comfort for sisters. One detects among them a sense of having lived in a very special time and through an important period of change. Because the remaining sisters are predominantly older, they have much in common, shared reference points, a culture and history that would be difficult to communicate to younger sisters entering after Vatican II. Age and rank are still

important to some of them and one can see traces of their former customs, such as standing when a former Mother Superior enters the room and addressing each other as "sister."

Here are some statements from older sisters:

I have few needs and fewer wants...I will be a religious to the end (Field Notes 4:56, 10/19/92).

I am still living the gospel and I don't recall a day of unhappiness (Field Notes 1:12, 9/15/92).

I'm ready for the other side now; I'm closer to the end than to the beginning. I won't see the end of things. Death is a big part of our lives here. I feel ready for it (Field Notes 12:169, 6/4/93).

We can give others life regardless of age, as long as we're together in the end. There is a peace and some advantage to age and we joke about it. What else can you do? (Field Notes 14:192, 8/4/92).

Younger people see things differently. When I made a commitment to my community that was a commitment for life. Like marriage...with the exception of abuse...and I don't mean lack of money or petty disagreements. A lot of changes came and I'm not saying it was easy but like marriage, is it okay only when the money is coming in? Many left that community commitment because their security shield was gone. They were not secure. We have concerns now, financially I mean; what may be happening down the line? Hello, county farms! Hopefully we'll all be together anyway (Field Notes 30:425, 2/20/94).

Wylie (1980) studied the elderly in a dying community to determine whether they would have different perspectives on growing old than their counterparts in a growing, thriving town. She found that the loneliness and stigma of aging were muted and that the elderly in her sample achieved significantly higher life satisfaction scores than their age peers in three other thriving communities in the Midwest. She noted that the community

itself was withdrawing from social and economic contribution, exhibiting leisurely lifestyles, less preoccupation with gainful employment, and more opportunities for friendships with those who remained in the community. She described an aging subculture in which care, when needed, was freely offered by friends and neighbors and in which advanced age might even be considered an achievement, obscuring other status labels of earlier years (Wylie, 1980:255:256).

One could find a sense of this in the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Compassion where advanced chronological age did mean something. The older sisters remembered things, were a valuable knowledge base, and a source of the history of the order. Stress became a thing of the past and death is seen not necessarily as the end, but as a final state of peace.

Just as the environment of a particular place may affect the status of aging persons, the Sisters of Compassion and the Solemnites offer a contrast. The Sisters of Compassion are one example of a declining community where formal status barriers have been loosened. There is more freedom of expression and nostalgia about old traditions, as well as a new sharing of personal experiences. For example, during an interview I had with one sister, another woman 20 years her senior entered the room. Following sister's lead, I stood up as a sign of deference. We invited her to join us and soon the two of

them were conversing about things they had never discussed in the past. Although one had been the other's teacher and they had known each other for 40 years, they had never before discussed their former lives or families. It appeared that they were getting to know one another in a less formal way by putting formal status aside (cf. the film, "The Remains of the Day"). After the older sister left the room, the younger nun commented that she had never before spoken to her about personal things, nor did she know such interesting things about her former life (Field Notes 12:171, 6/4/93).

The notion of a contracting social world for the elderly is true, not only of the aging nun, but of the community as a whole and it is in this sense that the sisters may feel less of the pain of losing their former status because it no longer exists as it once did. No one is coming to replace them. In contrast to those who leave the convent, consciously dropping their formal status, the women who remain have been abandoned by their status so-to-speak -- in that they have lost some of their institutional supports; yet they may have retained a sense of historical importance and their identities remain fixed in a once highly respected role. In the meantime, those who are aging appear to be highly regarded within their communities and seem to take great comfort in their former achievements.

In this chapter, I have summarized some of the ways in which members of active religious orders are reconstructing their present roles, including a positive view of their work, adaptation to secular dress, maintaining community, reclaiming history, creating symbols and ritual to support their goals, and renewing their commitment to their vows as well as to Christianity itself. In an ironic way, they may also derive some satisfaction from their past achievements and from the fact that their former status itself may die with them: their lifelong identity sustains them.

In addition to these considerations, Catholic sisters may also have reclaimed aspects of gender status that they had denied, or at least de-emphasized, upon entering the convent. In the next chapter, I will discuss the ways in which gender-status has affected female religious and how their experience compares with other groups of women in institutionalized roles.

CHAPTER IX

POINTS OF CONGRUENCE: NUNS AND GENDER

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which gender interacts with the other variables affecting both active and contemplative nuns today, such variables as type of order, degree of structural change, goals and work tasks, and historical and symbolic aspects of their respective cultures. It appears that as active sisters (those in apostolic orders, such as the Sisters of Compassion) have come closer to secular women in occupational experiences and concerns, they may have developed aspects of feminist consciousness related to their work experience, while the Solemnites (the contemplative order), who have retained a sexually-segregated community, have not. While the active sisters, for example, are concerned with issues that affect their occupational autonomy within the Church and are sympathetic with regard to the problems of secular women, some aspects of the feminist agenda, such as abortion and sexual harassment, are less relevant to them. The Solemnite community, despite what appears to be a more traditional view of sex roles, exhibits a lifestyle that is gender-affirming in a unique way. Retaining much of their former autonomy and internal control, the symbols of womanhood are very much intertwined with their theology.

Active Sisters and Feminism

While nuns are often thought of as the ultimate example of subordinate and powerless women working within a male-dominated institution (the Roman Catholic Church), the history of working nuns indicates that they may have had pro-feminist characteristics. The nuns who came to America would have had to be risk-takers, often challenged by the hierarchy, early settlers, and the physical environment. Their isolation gave them a certain amount of professional autonomy as they administered their own institutions and did not compete with males for positions. Prior to Vatican II, nuns had little contact with males other than in the classroom; as teachers and principals, they commanded respect from both students and male parishioners. The religious life gave sisters educational and professional opportunities often denied to lay women, as well as economic security. Domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning were relegated to specific members in order that teaching sisters could do their jobs without the added burden of homemaking duties expected of their secular counterparts. Many of the sisters discussed the positive aspects of education and professional training, as well as their desire not to emulate their own mothers' lives, which were often characterized by the hardships of raising several children and financial worries.

Some writers have speculated that the increased exposure to work in the outside world, higher levels of

education, constraints imposed by the male hierarchy for those working directly under male clergy, and loss of some of their former autonomy may have awakened a feminist consciousness in the contemporary nun (Quinonez and Turner, 1992; Raymond, 1972; Rooney, 1991; Wittberg, 1988, 1989). Sisters have now been exposed to feminist literature and persons involved in the women's movement (Wittberg, 1989:531). Writings in religious periodicals in the post Vatican II period reflect not only issues regarding new constitutions, psychological aspects of religious life, and the role of female religious in general, but also the issue of ordination of women to the priesthood (Kolmer, 1984:55; Rooney, 1991:129). In addition, pre and post-Vatican II issues have led to active networking and collaboration among sisters, a prerequisite for any social movement. Without a social movement, there is no social change.

Recently, nuns have indeed been cited in connection with feminism (Curb and Manahan, 1985; Wittberg, 1989) and have become more visible in social and political arenas (Ferraro and Hussey, 1990; Quinonez and Turner, 1992; Violet, 1988). Yet, when categorizing a nun as a "feminist," it is often presumed that all her views fall into line; for example, that she would be pro-choice. In a 1989 study, for example, Wittberg found that nuns tended to adopt feminist beliefs in relation to their own occupational experiences, particularly those employed in

male-dominated fields, but were more traditional on issues that have not directly affected them, such as abortion (Wittberg, 1989:532-33).

To explore the attitudes of active sisters (33) in the field-work sample for this dissertation, I asked their opinions on the women's movement in general, and more specifically on four issues: women priests, birth control, abortion, and sexual discrimination and/or harassment. Overall, the nuns did not characterize themselves as feminists, but some of them expressed sympathy with feminist causes. Here are some of their statements on how they view themselves in relation to feminism.

I am not a feminist. Some of them are loud and boisterous. I never felt I had to prove myself to a male. I'm a woman and I'm glad to be one but I've never had to pit myself against them. I wouldn't get into a feminist movement because I'm secure with myself. I'm Irish and when people would call me a "thick Mick" I didn't mind as long as they knew I was Irish (Field Notes 7:104, 3/12/93).

I consider myself a human being, a holistic one I hope. I don't have anything against men. I certainly think they are inconsiderate at times but there are women like that too. Negative people I move away from. We do have some feminists here but many of them have been abused by the clergy and I don't mean physically...but this is their way of reacting to that (Field Notes 14:190, 8/4/93).

Some of them (feminists) have come out so strong. They want to do what men can do...be cops, doctors, whatever. I think that we (nuns) should be more informed but not go overboard with it; you've got to keep a balance I feel. We follow it on the news and we have to know what's going on. Otherwise we couldn't serve the people. We have had letters signed to go to Congressmen on things such as abortion (Field Notes 8:118, 4/26/93).

While few of the nuns would label themselves as

"feminists," some presented views resembling those of other women working in positions subject to male authority, primarily those working as religious educators and pastoral ministers, where they must answer to local pastors and diocesan bishops. Of the 12 sisters who have worked directly under diocesan priests or bishops, 8 mentioned some conflict with their male colleagues. Six of these were minor, work-related disagreements and 2 were more serious clashes -- eg., disagreements concerning administrative decisions in the school and non-support for new pastoral programs, indicating perceived neglect of some priestly obligations towards parishioners --resulting in the sisters leaving their positions. Six of the 12 sisters in this group also expressed sorrow and empathy for the dilemmas being faced within the priesthood today. Despite negative experiences with some members of the hierarchy, many of the sisters seem to have an understanding of why these problems may arise between nuns and priests -- for example, work overload and stress.

On the subject of women priests, 9 women were not in favor of this, 6 actively support ordination of females, and the balance (18) have mixed feelings, expressing the belief that this is a possibility but with certain qualifications or only under certain circumstances. Here are some of their statements:

No. The masculine realm is separate from the feminine and should be kept that way. I don't think women should be pole climbers. We're suited for gentler things. Why would God have created man and

woman? We are equal to be sure but each has a separate job. How would a woman do the Eucharist? This is my body, this is my blood are the words spoken. It wouldn't make sense for a woman to say those words (Field Notes 6:87, 2/3/93).

No. We should follow the Pope; with dwindling vocations, perhaps in the future (Field Notes 9:135, 4/30/93).

Some seemed to be thinking through the issue, such as the following:

I'm not for it..you know, in the future it looks bleak; ok, but if we really don't have that many priests around. I don't like to see a woman get up there just to show that she can do it too. But if a person is sincere who really lives what they preach, but I would be very fussy about who I'd want to see up there. Just to glorify themselves or to show they can do what a man does, no. We are to minister to the people, but I bet some do have the gift of being a priest, like _____; I could see her and I would support that. I am for it if we don't have any and we need ministers. I don't have a problem with that. Somebody's got to do this (Field Notes 8:119, 4/26/93).

Well, we do need the other side...you need someone to touch you, with feeling for people. We need feeling in decision-making too. We've never had that you see. Otherwise no action gets taken, for example, with gays (Field Notes 16:250, 10/19/93).

Some of the sisters brought up the issue of married priests as an option which should be explored. A group of sisters expressed concern because of the limited availability of priests coming in to say Mass in that the nuns often had to rearrange their schedules to accommodate this (Field Notes 33:465, 3/2/94). While some might accept female ordination only if need be in the future, others were more definitive.

No problem. They have a lot to offer spiritually to the people and they're doing lots of things now. If the Church cannot meet the needs of people due to

vocations, nowhere did Christ ever say I only want men. He didn't say it had to be he or a she. He just wanted to develop His whole philosophy and it didn't matter if it is a man or a woman. If a woman is good at electrical engineering, let her do it; if she can do great homilies, let her do it. He said bring the people to God and if a woman can do this better than some men, let her do it (Field Notes 14:191, 8/4/93).

Jesus used simple fisherman..it doesn't matter how many holes on the golf course you can hit. He said go out and preach and teach and He didn't say there is a stipulation on who you are. Some know how to use authority and some know how to follow it. The old way is gone. We need to look at women's growth in the Church. I don't think any women have any intention of taking over but they would like to be of service and if they can do this as priests, so be it. The Protestant churches have it all over us because they use everything they've got (Field Notes 23:312, 1/6/94).

I've known some wonderful Protestant ministers, their wives and children, all working together. I'm for it (Field Notes 32:451, 2/27/94).

Many of the sisters appeared to see this issue in terms of the future needs of the Church, rather than as an opportunity for the advancement of religious women. They appeared to put the institution ahead of themselves. One sister expressed fears about sisters being "co-opted" into a role that might destroy religious life as it is today if they became members of the formal hierarchy (Field Notes 33:467, 3/2/94). Others expressed surprise that women would even want the responsibilities of the priest because these are seen as upholding the structural and ritualistic aspects of the Church only and may take one further away from the people.

A lot of changes came that religious women went with but the Church didn't always move that way and by Church I mean hierarchy. This was a threat...sisters

were always bettering themselves while priests were never re-evaluating. Their job was a big one but a job explicitly stated. In the seminary they took the courses and got into the lifestyle -- to say the Mass, be a spiritual leader, and administer the sacraments to the sick and dying. Religious women are going into new jobs and have to be re-educated to do this. Priests are responsible for the structure of the Church only (Field Notes 27:1/29/94).

Why would I want to do that? My office is like a confessional! I probably hear more in my office than they do. This is a hands-on job (Field Notes 3:41, 9/30/92).

No. Those who do things and do them for a cause outside of themselves are the successes in life. You find that in the end those others will have the power but not respect (Field Notes 5:73, 1/19/93).

Overall, most of the sisters seem to accept that the ordination of women may be a possibility in the future, but that it is a decision to be made only by the Vatican and one that should be made only in the best interests of service to the people of the Church.

Other issues such as birth control and abortion do not affect celibate women, but they do affect the people the sisters are ministering to and this experience seems to have given them more exposure to problems women are facing. While none of the sisters expressed a favorable response to abortion, several spoke in more general terms about birth control and other moral decisions, reflecting the attitudes of many mainstream Catholics today.

On abortion:

I am absolutely opposed. How could you live with that? I would be haunted by it for the rest of my life. I've seen films depicting how it's done and what happens. I couldn't describe it to you (Field Notes 8:118, 4/26/93).

No one has the right to take a life. You teach children that you make proper decisions but always remember there are consequences -- no difference whether it is punching Johnny back or not. Which decision takes character? You teach them moral skills. The Church has never given those skills to make your own decisions. You have to re-teach adults so they're concern isn't just with themselves (Field Notes 14:180, 8/4/93).

I don't understand the great concern today over the rights of animals and the casualness about wrenching out a human life...the media makes us out to be saps. I'm no prude; just a nunny-bunny but the holiness of abstinence -the holiness of that act - is ignored and that's why kids get themselves put into positions that they can't handle. I tell them to stand on your own two feet (Field Notes 5:69-70, 1/19/93).

Several more statements to this effect were given which is in keeping with the Church's stand on abortion. On the other hand, two sisters were a bit more open on the issue of birth control.

These are moral decisions. This should be a decision of mature adults, especially if the choice is to die in childbirth. We can set guidelines but you might have two very different children, for example, and your decisions may not be the same for each (Field Notes 23:311, 1/6/93).

Both Church and state should stay away from this issue; it should be the decision of individuals (Field Notes 4:61, 10/19/92).

In addition, five of the sisters had campaigned for a gubernatorial candidate with a pro-choice agenda; however, it was issues other than abortion that had attracted them to this candidate, such as increased aid for women and dependent children, health care reform, and decreases in defense spending. Some also mentioned the regret they felt about individuals being hurt by political disagreements; for example, a local contractor who had

recently been fired by a Catholic bishop for supporting a pro-choice congressman.

On the question of sexual harassment, few nuns saw this issue as particularly important, perhaps because they could not relate this to their own experience. In fact, one nun said:

To quote my foundress, "the most uncommon thing of all common things is common sense;" sometimes you just have to use your head. I am much more concerned about educational opportunities for women (Field Notes 11:164, 6/4/93).

This statement and others indicate that sexual harassment and/or discrimination is more likely to be perceived in terms of one's own experience, which for them would be related to occupational opportunities and not interactional exchanges with males. In this area, the status of nun may still be a barrier to the kinds of sexual overtures experienced by other women on the job. As a result, they don't appear to view this as a serious issue. Other experiences they have mentioned indicate that their status may give them the upper hand in this, as well as other types of situations, such as one nun who refused to take a physical examination as required by her new job, (she told them it was "against her religion"), and another nun who had been stopped several times for speeding but had never gotten a ticket because she is well known in town. Others indicated that male students often came to them with personal problems they might not discuss with other older women and that there may be the

perception by some males that they are "off limits."

In summary, it can be said that as apostolic sisters continue to work in new occupational roles, they may eventually be more influenced by feminist ideas and take active roles in shaping the future of the Church. While they express some sympathy with feminist issues, these are primarily related to work roles and not to other aspects of women's experience (such as abortion, for example); however, increased exposure to American society, as well as some of the problems facing women today, may influence their attitudes in the future.

Gender and the Contemplative Nuns

In contrast to the active sisters, the issue of gender in the Solemnite community will not be analyzed here in the context of the consciousness of members, since I did not (and could not) formally interview members of this community, other than the Mother Superior. Rather, I base my conclusions on a working knowledge of the culture of their community, some of their writings, as well as my own experiences and impressions in being allowed to be a participant-observer in the cloister.

The Mother Superior emphasized to me that the Solemnites are among the most conservative orders in the United States, which would explain their reluctance to get involved with groups such as the Association for Contemplative Nuns. However, this more traditional outlook does not mean that women in these communities live

out their lives in ways that have no congruence with other women's groups, nor does it mean that gender is not an important aspect of it.

The role model for the Solemnites is St. Therese (of Lisieux), also known as "The Little Flower." A member of a reformed contemplative order known for its austerities, (in keeping with the idea that mortification was good for the soul), Therese is often cited as the ideal of celibacy, obedience, gentleness, and piety -- an image reflected in what has been written about her by priests. Another side of her personality emerges in some of her more recent biographies in that she is also described as having had a "toughness, sharpness, and independence of mind" (Furlong, 1987:130) -- what we would now call "gutsiness." Her short stay in the convent was filled with personal frustrations and disappointments, which she is said to have overcome through her life of devotion and self-denial. While at times portrayed as naive, Therese is also described as intelligent and shrewd, and as having perhaps chosen a life of mortification as a form of heroism, a life where hunger, cold, pain, frustration, and deprivation became her "work" and an extension of martyrdom. She is also said to have had a penchant for high drama (Furlong, 1987:77) and may have turned the volatile emotions and energies of adolescence into the only outlet generally available to women in 19th century France. The cloister

provided a life of austerity, simplicity, precision, and structure, a link with nature and the seasons, a life of contrasts and extremes -- heat and cold, day and night, black and white; an environment in which one could detach oneself from human feelings and needs. The longing for love, attention, and self-expression could then be turned towards a "strange kind of abandonment" (Furlong, 1987:95-96) that was liberating, turning acquiescence into heroism. The charm of her innocence, as well as her tragic death at the young age of 24, captivated the imagination of French Catholics, and she had a cult-following after her death. Furlong (1987) contends that Therese represented:

...a model for the power, endurance, and resourcefulness of women, a power which, even when intolerably constricted, crushed, and punished by circumstances, reasserts itself with the tenacity of a weed (or little flower) growing on a wall (Furlong, 1987:130).

The lifestyle of the Solemnites is modeled on "The Little Way" -- a life lived with what is given, with kindness, unselfishness, and detailed care, doing all things, no matter how small, the right way and doing them for love (Furlong, 1987:96-97). Like St. Francis, another of the saints cited as a source of guidance for the Solemnites, their lifestyle emphasizes gentleness, piety, and self-denial, yet there is a resourcefulness and strength about this as well. Several times the Mother Superior spoke of the "challenge" that this life provides and the strength required of those who choose it. The heroic aspects of

this life give an ironic quality to it. This fortitude may in some ways be linked symbolically with gender, and in particular the biological aspects of the feminine, a theme which bears some explanation here.

Aspects of the Solemnite ideology reflect a spirituality connected with the physicality of suffering. Mortification and penance are primary; many of their metaphors reflect the physicality of asceticism. Their idea of "Sitio" meaning "I thirst" and their motto -- "To Adore, To Suffer, To Repair" (AM;SN:3) -- capture the spirit of their community. Their writings, art work, and prayers reflect not only the glorification of suffering, but the symbols of the lifeblood, of intercession and nurturance as a needed and natural aspect of the female. There are many references to motherhood, to the "precious blood of Christ" and His mother, "whose immaculate womb became the source of the Blood of the Word" (Archival Materials SN:3), a feeling of connection with the physical suffering of Christ through veneration of his blood and celebration of the female body that gave birth to Him. This emphasis on physicality is reminiscent of the more traditional imagery and ritual of the pre-Vatican II Church, providing a connection with the sacred in that only through suffering, by denying the body through fasting and mortifications, can one be truly sanctified. Their prayers and writings employ body metaphors, such as reference to the "blood of life," to rebirth, to the body

as a sacred vessel. There is also a familial tone to their expressions; for example, their reference to their first monastery as "the cradle of the institute" and their overall emphasis on motherhood: They are the mothers of those for whom they intercede, their sufferings offered up for the benefit of others.

One comes away with a feeling of specialness, of pride in womanhood, not in a sexual sense, but in a nurturant and very physical way (woman as a giver of life), a sense of something that could be considered a special spirituality that is dependent upon gender. Stripped of the encumbrances of the outside world -- the pleasures of eating, drinking, smoking, and looking good -- the weight of these things being lifted, produces a void which provides space for another level of experience.

It is in this sense that the lifestyle of the Solemnites appears gender-affirming. In addition, despite their emphasis on piety and self-denial, this community, as pointed out previously, shows a certain assertiveness with regard to the work they perform. They make their own decisions with a spirit of collegiality, a sense of independence, and protectiveness for their members.

In summary, I can assert, based on my observations, that the Solemnites appear to draw upon aspects of the physicality of womanhood to enhance their own spirituality. Their isolation and spiritual exercises seem to enhance their identity as women, almost as

primordial women, giving life and sustenance to the Earth, an echo, even an invocation, of the centrality of goddesses in very ancient times. It should be noted here that these were my impressions of their culture, aspects of which are taken from their writings, but not formally explained to me as such by the sisters. Many of the above statements reflect the "feelings" invoked in me after some limited exposure to their community. In the next section, I attempt to tie together some aspects of gender in the context of both types of religious communities, the active and contemplative, as well as to other women's groups.

Points of Congruence

Although it may be impossible for nuns to adopt the entire feminist agenda if they are to remain as religious, there appear to be some areas of congruence between nuns and other women's groups in that some of their beliefs and practices are gender-affirming and analagous to other groups fulfilling voluntary roles within male-dominated systems. Studies of Arab Middle Eastern women, for example, show evidence of a difference between their expected and actual subservience to males (Morsy, 1988:88; El-Solh, 1988:109). Others have found that the segregation of the sexes -- eg., in Bedouin society in Western Egypt that Abu Lughod has studied, and in cloisters and other institutions -- allows women exclusive control of information in order to control decisions, a strategy that has been described as a "conspiracy of

silence" (Abu-Lughod, 1988:151).

...the structure of information flow between the men's and women's worlds was not symmetrical. Because of the pattern of hierarchy, men spoke to one another in the presence of women, while the reverse was not true. In addition, young and low-status men served as informants on men's affairs to mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and wives, whereas no one brought news to the adult men (Abu-Lughod, 1988:151).

It can be said that nowadays there are perhaps two types of society, even two discordant trends within the same society, that would help us to clarify the position of women, give them their due in influence and ability, as well as correct a rather dominant act of stereotyping observable in some of the writings of academically-cloistered, White, middle-class feminist authors of limited experience. The two types of society can be termed "fully-patriarchal" and "somewhat-matriarchal" (the latter also called in anthropological literature the "crypto-matriarchal" tradition): the former is especially true of market-based, heavily individualized, post-industrial countries (the U.S. and Northern Europe); the latter of Mediterranean countries (Italy and Spain, for example), and parts of the Third World (e.g., the Islamic countries of the Middle East). The latter has a pre-industrial ethos of altruism that more noticeably seems to permeate daily life: Women are respected for their emotional roles and the qualities they bring to family life and management of households; in a word, for their kinship-work and life-enhancing capacities (cf. Hijab, 1988:x-i, 1-8; Tucker, 1993:195-207; Warnock, 1990:25).

They are much more autonomous in their own realm than Westerners are inclined to think.

Traditionally, by virtue of their sexually-segregated lifestyle, both contemplative and apostolic nuns were also "masters of their own realm," retaining their distance from the formal male hierarchy, a distance that may be lessening for apostolic orders.

Similarly, Kaufman (1991) describes women who belong to fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic Christian groups as having rejected feminist politics but nevertheless making claims for an enhanced status for women and for greater claims upon men as husbands and fathers within those patriarchal traditions (Kaufman, 1991:11). This has also been referred to as "difference feminism," (Davis, 1991:476) where negative stereotypes become positive and female values are celebrated, rather than making attempts to emulate male models. For example, some women who have returned to Orthodox Judaism, after having been educated in the secular world, have rejected contemporary Western female symbols to embrace the biological and reproductive capacities of womanhood, affording gender-affirming lifestyles, although carried out under the patriarchal structure of Orthodox Judaism (Davidman and Greil, 1993; Kaufman, 1991). As Kaufman points out, orthodoxy might be seen as an institutional protection for women; that is, a protection not dependent upon individual males but upon a system, upon a theology

that they believe is "feminine in principle" (Kaufman, 1991:13). By "feminine" in this context is meant caring and emotionally responsive.

Similarly, the Catholic Church has been described by one male theologian as "lay, faithful, and feminine" (vonBalthasar in McDade, 1991:428-429). While ambivalent attitudes towards women may have been a result of their association with the temporal world, in religion the feminine qualities of humility and submission were conducive to piety. Pain and humility were closer to the idea of a suffering God, and therefore, a means of approach to the divine. Just as charity and modesty are part of the Jewish Orthodox ethic for both sexes (Kaufman, 1991:159), humility and holiness are expected of both male and female religious. Whereas males are forced to use a form of gender-reversal (a show of humility, for example) to emulate piety (Bynum, 1987:287-88), females could draw inspiration for their spirituality from their own gender, something which would also serve to reaffirm the secondary status already assigned them (Curran, 1989:97). In addition, the Church provided institutionalized protection to female religious communities by recognizing them as important organizations. The idea of "Mother Church" provided a link to the special piety of the female. This link between piety and aspects of womanhood can be singled out to illustrate the ways in which each group of nuns may be using aspects of gender in their own ways to negotiate

their roles.

Following the more traditional model of religious life, the Solemnites capture the essence of the feminine in their form of asceticism, while the active sisters, who have adopted a less traditional form, may now have reclaimed those aspects of gender that support their current work; that is, while the subservience and social and emotional distance maintained by sisters in the pre-Vatican II era is less emphasized, the emotive and nurturant aspects of womanhood are now recognized and celebrated. Active sisters are in a better position today than the male hierarchy to work closely with lay people, to help them solve problems, and to develop their own spirituality through their work. In addition, links with other orders and other women's groups have given them exposure to political issues within the Church, as well as the outside world, leading to their incorporation of a more feminist viewpoint. On the other hand, contemplative nuns, such as the Solemnites, by virtue of their sexually-segregated lifestyle, are free to develop their own spirituality, calling upon those aspects of gender (such as the physicality of life and its female element) to legitimate and uphold their beliefs, all within a Church-sanctioned institutional structure.

Despite their secondary status within the Church, both types of nuns appear to negotiate personally-fulfilling roles by avoiding many of the problems of women

in secular society, in some cases by-passing male clerical authority -- for example, active sisters are providing counseling for single mothers and the divorced who do not feel comfortable confiding in the clergy and designing and implementing their own ministries, while the Solemnites adhere to their own proscriptions on the work they will agree to undertake. Increased contacts between the active sisters and the clergy due to collaboration on parish programs may lead to future conflicts. Both types of female orders, however, challenge the traditional expectations attributed to gender, such as child-rearing and male affirmation. Many expressed this freedom as a plus.

Like Jewish Orthodox women, these women appear to have retained the emotive and intuitive aspects of womanhood but unlike them, sisters have rejected the sexual and biological function of woman and have managed to transcend sex role identity and attain a "more neutral personhood" (Reuther and McLaughlin, 1979:23). The Solemnites are distinctive in that they have also rejected the reproductive aspects of womanhood as part of their own human experience, but retain a sanctified view of the biological and reproductive functions of women as important in a spiritual sense. While Jewish Orthodox traditions emphasize the importance of the biological aspects of women, as well as their contributions to the family, all nuns have given up personal identification

with the reproductive and sexual aspects of their own identities. Problems that might be encountered by women in Jewish Orthodox and Christian fundamentalist traditions (as well as mainstream women) as they reach middle age -- that is, beyond the child-rearing years -- may not be encountered by nuns who derive honor by virtue of their age and rank within their communities, and not as wives, mothers, and grandmothers. Finally, as modern feminists challenge the traditional definitions of sexuality and maternity, their brand of liberalism reflects the values of a technological society in which rationality, order, predictability, and objectification of people and things is paramount. As we have seen here, this way of thinking is not necessarily the way of all women. Admittedly, nuns not only reject the traditional realm of sexuality and reproduction for themselves, they make it a vow, legitimated by an institution -- the Catholic Church. On the other hand, they are able to turn the emotive and physical symbolism of the female into a source of spirituality and in a way, even superiority.

Although women in this sample from both types of communities reject the label of feminism as it is understood today, my interview and observational evidence from both groups shows some ways in which gender interacts with their particular lifestyles. While there is compatibility with some feminist beliefs, their attitudes on specific issues seem to reflect their own particular

experiences and level of exposure to the outside world. Underlying this is the issue of control over their own lives, whether that be in a cloistered convent or working actively in the world. Those who have entered religious life have made a conscious choice and many have kept their commitment. The plight of the active American nun is in some ways similar to that of American women in general. Our roles have become multi-dimensional and ambiguous. With more choices have come more demands, many of these conflicting. The cloister is perhaps the best example of a way in which women found they could escape the modern symbols of womanhood as patriarchally defined by the society at large. For those who find those symbols increasingly untenable, the convent provides for some a world of peace and absolutes, free from political correctness, ostentation, greed, and lust. In many ways the challenges and rewards of this lifestyle cannot be easily found in modern American society. Although nuns may have chosen a different path from most of us, they appear to assert themselves as women in their own ways, while reflecting what can be found in women as a whole -- the need to affirm the value of their personhood.

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which gender interacts with other variables affecting the contemporary lives of American nuns. In examining their opinions on the women's movement, as well as specific

issues such as women priests, birth control, and sexual discrimination, my distinct impression is that while active sisters have come closer to secular women in tasks and concerns, perhaps leading them to a more feminist view of the world, they do not accept the entire feminist "package." In addition, aspects of gender may be influencing both active and contemplative nuns in different ways. The nurturant and emotive aspects of womanhood enhance the current work of the active orders, while the Solemnites, following an older tradition that enforces sexual segregation, maintain a lifestyle that is gender-affirming of womanness, of the female principle, in its own way.

In the next chapter, I summarize the conclusions drawn from this study and then go on to discuss the future of religious orders of women, offering some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS OF WOMEN

In this chapter, I summarize the major conclusions drawn from this fieldwork, integrating these findings with previous research, and placing them within the context of the theoretical questions posed at the outset of this dissertation. Observations and corollary speculations regarding the future form of religious communities, as well as some suggestions for future research, are herewith included.

The major questions posed in this dissertation reflect the interlinkage of different levels of analysis. The broader issues raised include the following: Why and how do social systems become obsolete, or at the very least, endangered? How does societal and cultural change influence existing institutions? In what ways do changes in the internal structures of organizations affect their viability? Finally, how are changes in social systems reflected in the consciousness of the remaining members of these organizations? These broad questions give rise to the more specific issues considered with regard to Roman Catholic nuns in the United States, which can be summarized as follows:

1. How has the influence of American culture affected the survival of Roman Catholic religious orders of women?

2. How have religious orders of women as social systems been functionally altered since Vatican II?
3. How do the nuns themselves negotiate and legitimate their current roles, given these societal and cultural changes?
4. What points of congruence are there between the experience and attitudes of the nuns and other women's groups?

My findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Societal and cultural change has challenged the legitimacy of traditional forms of Catholic religious organizations in the United States. A receptiveness to change and the compatibility of some American values with the more open and tolerant themes of Vatican II, may have facilitated rapid structural changes in American convents, such as democratic governmental structures, more egalitarian relations, and recognition of individual rights and work preferences.
2. As social organizations, many of the active orders, such as the Sisters of Compassion, were structurally altered by elimination of the rigid training, strict monitoring, and fixed boundaries of the past (such as the formal habit and social and physical separation from the secular world), while contemplative orders, such as the Solemnites, were less structurally impaired by maintaining more traditional aspects of convent culture. As a result, many communities of active sisters have been jeopardized in that they have lost members and are not able to recruit new ones. The Sisters of Compassion have responded by centralizing the governance of their organization, becoming involved in new ministries, expanding their lay associate program, and working on new ways to attract members in the future. The Solemnites continue to function very much as they have in the past.
3. The active sisters in this study appear to be in the process of reconstructing their status as women religious (hence, the term "emergent status-reconstruction") by drawing upon the positive aspects of their earlier training, the history of their particular orders, their vows, the gospels, and the basic foundations of Christianity. They appear to be maintaining, and in some cases, creating rituals (for example, designing their own prayer schedules and services that suit their own living situations) that help to sustain their lifestyles and goals, connecting

their current roles with the sources that pre-date the kinds of structures imposed after Vatican I.

4. Both the Sisters of Compassion and the Solemnites exhibit gender-affirming beliefs and values that legitimate their current roles. While the active sisters may have come closer to secular women in tasks and concerns, perhaps leading them towards a more feminist consciousness, they do not accept some of the more mainstream feminist opinions on abortion, nor do they express concern over some issues of gender inequality (such as sexual harassment and female exclusion from the male hierarchy); rather, they appear to be more concerned with educational opportunities and the occupational autonomy of women, and also with the needs of the Church and how they could contribute to it in the future. They have reclaimed the nurturant and emotive aspects of gender in the fulfillment of their work. The Solemnites, whose lifestyle continues to be more sexually-segregated, draw upon female physicality to enhance their spirituality. Both groups of nuns, as emotive and nurturant women, share with other more traditional groups, such as Jewish Orthodox, Arab Middle-Eastern, and American right-wing and Fundamentalist women, a way of elevating their status through the use of female imagery and symbols.

Each of these conclusions will be more fully addressed below.

Societal and Cultural Influences

Conflict between traditional convent culture and contemporary Western values was addressed by a Belgian Cardinal named Leon Joseph Suenens in 1961, whose now well-known book, The Nun in the World, was written to address dwindling vocations in Europe. He advised that religious connect their real missions with the needs of modern society. At that time, America was experiencing an unprecedented influx into religious orders. Some of the possible reasons for this were the increased enrollment in holy orders of the daughters of immigrant Catholics, the

rise in the birth rate at mid-century, the displacement of women in the labor force by returning veterans after World War II, and the educational and professional opportunities the convent afforded to American women.

Yet Western secular values, along with those which were peculiarly American, were entering into convents as well. As an outside observer of American Catholicism, Lozano (1991) suggested that the historical experience of Americans gave them a distinctive outlook which was compatible with the changes that would come after Vatican II. The American values of individualism over solidarity, privacy over groupness, activism over prayer, materialism, and patriotism made American Catholics distinct. Some of the "ideal" values of American culture, along with the climate of social change evident in the mid-1960s may have contributed to American acceptance of changes in traditional religious forms such as Catholicism. The egalitarianism which spurred on the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the rise of feminist consciousness, and an awareness of social justice issues in general at that time may have made Americans more receptive to the ecumenism of Vatican II. The separation of Church and State, which had forced Catholics to build their own institutions, also bred a sense of patriotism towards a country which has been traditionally receptive to immigrants. America may have been deemed "mission territory," but it was also regarded as a land of plenty (cf. Novak, 1973:103-130),

where God was seen as generous and not punitive, a land where Thanksgiving has religious overtones and is a more popular holiday than Easter. The new philosophy of Vatican II represented a break with the old view of the world as a harbinger of sin, emphasizing the world as created out of love.

Despite the fact that America has maintained unchanging democratic political structures and has exhibited its share of intolerance and bigotry, breaking with the past has also been a part of American tradition. This receptiveness to change, as well as the compatibility of the new vision of Vatican II with some "ideal" American values, at least in theory -- such as a spirit of openness, relative tolerance, and risk-taking -- may have accounted for the rapidity with which changes in American Catholicism took place. In addition, the basic notions of egalitarianism and democratic decision-making characteristic of American institutions may have been more readily adopted by religious communities in the United States.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the Catholic institutions which would be most affected by this new spirit of liberation, while freed from outdated customs, were also structurally jeopardized, as is discussed below.

Organizational Decline

The speed of social change has seen the demise of other normative organizations, such as the Shakers, as

well as the rise and fall of religious cults in present times. Ebaugh (1993) identified four types of exogenous factors leading to the decline of normative organizations as: (1) goals have been fulfilled; (2) goals become irrelevant to a changing society; (3) loss of a resource base; and (4) other organizations take over the functions of the organization (Ebaugh, 1993:173-174), factors that apply to active religious orders of women. Applying this model to the two case study orders is appropriate here.

While the broad philosophy of the Sisters of Compassion, an active/apostolic order, has not changed, their focus has shifted from education to social work and health care. As mentioned earlier, their primary goals may to some extent have been reached -- that is, the education and acceptance of Catholic immigrant groups. On the other hand, the goal of the Sisters of Compassion is humanitarian and broad in the sense that several different types of ministries have evolved over time that fall under this category. While earlier goals may have become less relevant, there are various social problems in America that, despite government intervention, have not been resolved; for example, the poverty of inner cities, problems of single parenthood, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, Aids, and the exacerbation of these problems by the recent economic recession. It is difficult to make a case for lack of need or goal fulfillment to explain the decline in religious orders. Resources, however, have

dwindled in that several factors have affected recruitment; for example, expanding opportunities for women, feminist ideology, declining birth rates, and the increased legalization and credentialization of society which affected nuns as professional women (Ebaugh, 1993:163); that is, the nature of their work has become partially dependent upon the extent to which professional and educational credentials are required for it. In addition, the role of government has continued to expand into the areas of education, health care, and social services, these being the previous domain of holy orders.

With regard to the contemplative orders, while direct mandates from Vatican II, as well as the influence of some aspects of American culture and demographic changes, would alter the cloister and its recruitment in the late 1960s, the influence of feminism may not have been as much of a factor due to the absence of occupational diversity and new professional contacts with the outside world, these factors being much more characteristic of active sisters. Advanced education and professional credentials would not be an inducement for women to enter a fully-cloistered community. The primary goal of the Solemnites, as with other contemplative orders, is inner-directed and spiritual, and in a sense, never fully achieved. While they may perform pragmatic tasks, these are secondary to their primary goal of prayer and intercession: The Solemnites have adapted their work tasks to accommodate

their lifestyle, while the Sisters of Compassion have adapted their lifestyle to better accommodate their pragmatic tasks which are undertaken in the world.

These factors, together with the disruption that followed after Vatican II, indicate that in addition to the issue of goals and resources, the reasons for decline can also be found on the structural (that is, the (hierarchical/stratificational) level, and consequently, on the ideological level as well.

Structural Changes

With regard to the internal organization of communities, both orders have adopted a more democratic style of decision making, with the Solemnites retaining a more paternalistic pattern by virtue of the tightness of their community. The Sisters of Compassion have eliminated the rigid training, strict monitoring, and fixed boundaries of the past, such as the social and physical separation of the nun from the secular world and accompanying symbols of separation, such as the traditional habit. Democratic procedures have been adopted, accompanied by recognition and acceptance of the psychological aspects of individual development and growth. Normative controls have shifted to individual compliance, which many nuns find liberating. However, the elimination of some of the former rituals and structure of their communities has left a void for some. The loss of their "Gemeinschaft" -- that is, the spirit and security

of a tightly-bound community -- damaged the primary group ties that had sustained them in the past. It is at the structural level that we can best see the crux of social change; that is, pre-modern notions of solidarity and adherence to tradition which had been submerged in the community were replaced by modern notions regarding human rights, independence, and individualism. In essence, the nuns became "persons," rather than "members."

From a social psychological standpoint, the security needs of the nuns were threatened which consequently affected their esteem as a group, eventually resulting in damaged self-esteem, which may have accounted for the personal dissatisfaction of those who eventually left the convent. As has been documented here, the active sisters have created innovative ways of sustaining rituals, to re-create or simulate in some cases their former means of community support, for example, by planning their own prayer services, re-designing their living quarters to accommodate places for worship, and scheduling communal meetings for those who are now geographically remote. These rituals help to legitimate the religious aspect of their work, but the institution has yet to design a new type of formal organization that will attract willing recruits in the future. In contrast, the rituals upholding the Solemnite community remain largely intact.

While the predicted outcomes cited for declining organizations include: centralization of authority, re-

allocation of resources, manipulation of the environment, internal discord, fear of risk-taking, and decreased morale, Ebaugh (1993) found little evidence to support these in her sample of active religious (Ebaugh, 1993:30-45). While the Sisters of Compassion have adopted democratic leadership styles, they have, in fact, attempted to centralize authority by integrating regional communities under one authority structure and are re-allocating resources by sending sisters to different states and, if need be, to different countries, using whatever talents are available to accomplish their goals. While turf battles and declining morale were not evident in Ebaugh's sample, nor mine, discussions and active collaboration for change are bringing out various views, and in some cases, disagreements, but this is the way of democracy. There appears to be a great deal of discussion and concern on the part of sisters: many indicated that they were now reading as much as possible and discussing among themselves new ideas for change, a far cry from the days when books such as The Nun in the World were not even available for sisters, except at the discretion of their Mother Superior (Curran, 1989:146). There is also evidence of risk-taking in that they are taking on new ministries, such as caring for Aids victims, taking assignments in Third World countries, and in some cases, challenging the hierarchy on social justice issues, such as homosexuality and abortion.

While accepting of the fact that religious orders as we have known them will probably not exist into the next century, the Sisters of Compassion have not as yet given up. The theme of emergent status-reconstruction, -- that is, the changing of one's status due to external pressures -- while it involves the creative aspects of persons in maintaining a viable identity for themselves, also includes the attempts to restructure a role for those who may follow in the future. Despite the fact that sisters in declining orders may exhibit what appear to be high levels of morale, and even a certain satisfaction grounded in their past identities, there are also indications of concern for the future of their orders and their particular goals. Finally, any new structural changes that are implemented will have to address the issue of legitimation and the consciousness of members.

Legitimation and Consciousness

As mentioned earlier, the organized ritual and symbols that had protected the formal status of nun were radically altered, if not eliminated, after Vatican II. The normative compliance ensured by ritual became a function of individual commitment, giving active sisters the responsibility of maintaining their own spirituality. The Sisters of Compassion have drawn upon their history, their vows, the gospels, and Christianity itself to bring a sense of legitimacy to their roles. Former studies of the status passage of nuns into secular life have

indicated the need to connect former status with current roles, to bridge these statuses in order to have a satisfying life in the present (Ebaugh, 1984:170-171; San Giovanni, 1978:139). For those who remain in a diminishing status, there is a similar process of integrating past and present into a workable identity in the here and now; and furthermore, the process of working this out is emergent in the sense that there are no available role models or precedents for it. It is this process of "emergent status-reconstruction" which I identify as a phenomenon of women in apostolic orders today, such as the Sisters of Compassion. They must rely on the burden of memory as guides, drawing upon those sources that pre-date the rigid structures imposed by Vatican I to re-claim and re-work who they are in the present.

In addition, both orders studied have drawn upon aspects of gender as well -- the Sisters of Compassion exemplifying in their work the nurturant and emotive side of womanhood, and the Solemnites representing the sacredness of the female in a spiritual sense. Both show gender affirmation, exhibiting the strength and assertiveness of women, despite their institutionalized roles within a male-dominated institution.

While in some ways comparing communities such as the Sisters of Compassion with the Solemnites is like "comparing apples and oranges," the differences in their

structures point to some interesting conclusions about what may be lacking in the declining orders.

Contemplative orders such as The Solemnites, as well as some active orders who have retained aspects of their tradition or former structure, such as the religious habit, formalized ritual, and paternalistic relations, are attracting members.

What do we make of all of this? We must ask what is required within the consciousness of members for legitimation and commitment to be upheld. It may be that what is lacking today in religious communities, as well as in Catholicism in general, is the imagination, experience, and storytelling of pre-doctrinal Catholicism. Recapturing the symbol, image, and story does not mean a return to superstition, to blind obedience, to ostentatious customs, nor to the former caste systems of convents. Rather, it means to recapture what one sociologist calls the "sacramental imagination" (Greeley, 1990:272). This is not incompatible with the vision of Vatican II; in fact, a return to the gospels, to the life and intentions of Jesus (Christ taught by parables, by stories), and to the real meaning of Christian life is what is being attempted at present. The active sisters, for example, are attempting to integrate personal religious experience with social justice issues, thereby working against the traditional institution which has often separated ethical decision-making from the spiritual

and personal (Collins, 1974:217). But there is a need for symbols that connect the missions of the nuns with the religious aspect of their work and rituals that continue to inculcate and activate the spiritual and emotive part of their lives. This is not to say that the sisters do not have a deep spiritual side, only that the symbol and ritual which bind the group together and need the group to be effectual, would help to enhance that spirituality.

While Jung, Freud, and Maslow provide tools to analyze the human side of experience, these are "techniques" only and are not to be confused with spirituality. One can be spiritual while psychologically wounded and vice versa (Lozano, 1961:60-61). Relying on psychology alone will not be enough to maintain a commitment to religious life or to anything. In fact, one of the characteristics of late capitalism, which may be a function of the "legitimation crisis" discussed by Habermas (1975), is the inability of persons to be committed to anything permanent in our society. To help reduce the fear engendered by lack of meaning, we need symbols to connect what we are doing with something beyond ourselves; that is, cosmically and meta-personally. (Although sociologists are "scientists," we too have our symbols and saints. The feverishness of sociologists to find "studies" is their way of contributing to the stock of human narratives; Christ taught by parables; sociologists teach by "studies!" The two types of

anecdotes may have something meta-humanly common: that is, they bridge the gap between experience and meaning. Humans have an emotive or "non-rational" side, an aesthetic need perhaps satisfied by the narrative, the story, the symbol, the ritual -- in this case, the sacramental imagination -- which validates what we are doing in the real world.)

The two case study orders of this dissertation exemplify two things: mission and message. The Sisters of Compassion carry out the active work of the gospels, while the Solemnites foster and replenish the message they contain. It is more difficult for the active sisters to maintain themselves spiritually without the symbolic connection between action and belief. This, in my opinion, will be required in order for them to overcome their own particular legitimation crises and to attract women in the future -- whether or not these communities maintain a formal status within the Catholic Church.

The Future of Religious Orders of Women

Thirty years have passed since the Second Vatican Council set in motion the radical changes that would affect the lives of so many Catholic nuns. In the process of renewal, many religious orders have lost members, resources, and a sense of identity within the Catholic Church. Yet those who have remained in their communities persevere in their missions. While the mass exodus from convents appears to be over, it may be too early to assess

the future role of religious orders of women in the Catholic Church.

Female apostolic orders have had a much shorter history within the Church than have contemplative nuns, the former having been recognized as bona fide religious by the Church only as recently as 1900. In retrospect, their acceptance as formal religious orders -- women out in the world, in the world of action -- has been short-lived. In response to Vatican mandates, the Sisters of Compassion have geared their ministries to a new age and in so doing have encountered many obstacles. They may evolve into a group that more closely resembles their 19th century counterparts, women doing humanitarian work in the days of their pre-religious status.

While vocations have declined, the sisters indicated that their lay associate programs are growing. This is an opportunity for both men and women to make short-term commitments to the congregation's ministry without taking permanent vows. Community mergers seem likely and the female priesthood may evolve in the future. They have indicated that groups may remain small, that there will be more inter-community living, and that there may eventually be one large congregation or organization with several apostolate programs working together in the world. Others have indicated that some orders have lost formal status within the Church -- for example, the Immaculate Heart Community in Los Angeles where celibacy is optional and

people can marry (Griffin, 1975:212).

As the women's movement progresses, more women may seek alternatives to the traditional lifestyles that are open to them at present. Women are living longer and those with families have more time after their children leave the household to devote to social causes. Many are choosing not to marry and to pursue professional careers. Alternate lifestyles and family forms are replacing more traditional ones. The job market, while never expansive for middle aged women, is now shrinking for all of us, limiting professional opportunities for both men and women. In addition, the huge federal deficit may make reliance on governmental programs to solve social problems impossible. Finally, comparisons with other women's groups have shown that orthodoxy, in whatever form, may be preferable to the exploitative and demeaning symbols of womanhood that seem to prevail in contemporary American society, particularly in the mass media.

If another form of social organization is designed that attracts women into a new way of life, one which does not impinge on their personal goals, nor their psychological well-being, there may be hope for a type of religious order that can work towards eliminating social problems in the future, while providing a communal lifestyle that is satisfying to individual women. It is difficult to say whether this type of group would ever have formal recognition from the Roman Catholic Church.

Some Suggestions for Future Research

The study of Catholic nuns continues to generate questions for sociologists which move beyond the nuns' particular situation. Future research might focus on three different areas. First, for those interested in religious orders of women, comparisons of other contemplative and active orders, in terms of their structural differences, as well as ethnic, social class, and age composition within communities, might add to our knowledge about the future of religious orders. Gender inequality may continue to be an issue in the distribution of labor within the Catholic Church, particularly if vocations for both men and women continue to decline. Cross-cultural comparisons examining the influence of culture on structure might also be useful; for example, one might focus on Third World countries or on Catholic countries in general. One question that could be researched further is that of the purported rise in monasticism in the United States and whether this applies to both male and female orders. If this is the case, an examination of the structure of these communities may help identify those characteristics that may be attracting members.

Secondly, future research on persons in changing or declining normative organizations may indicate strategies similar to those observed among active nuns; that is, a process of emergent status-reconstruction as a form of

status passage, of adaptation in order to recapture or at least re-define a declining status.

Studies of other groups of mainstream and non-mainstream women, including those in formal institutionalized roles -- in the family, prisons, hospitals, and corporations -- may add to our knowledge of female experience in general. Some less studied women's groups, often without a voice and perhaps not accepting of a feminist agenda per se, should be included in the sociological study of women and added to the body of literature which is now addressing and attempting to articulate the experience of all women.

A Final Word

From the beginning, women have been a valuable resource for the Catholic Church, whether as lay women or religious. Both types of orders studied here were shaped by a larger institution and allowed to exist only under the auspices and regulations imposed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The history of the Sisters of Compassion indicates how a group of lay women who joined together for humanitarian goals were forced to adapt to the existing structures of religious women at that time. The foundress of the Solemnites needed the sponsorship of two male co-founders in order to legitimate her order. The essence of their differences is perhaps captured in the two foundresses, one who started out on the streets of Dublin

working with the poor, and the other a girl of only 18 years who modeled herself after St. Therese, another young woman who turned her energies into a heroic form of radical obedience that made her an important figure in Church history. The traditions these women represent are cogs in a much larger wheel -- they are both resisters to and participants in a process of long-term, historical, structural transformation taking place in the oldest institution of the Western world: the Catholic Church.

In many ways the story of these two orders reflects the experience of other women in American society, not only as victims of male-dominated institutional structures, but also as active participants in shaping their current and future roles. Catholic nuns embraced a life that might seem demeaning and subservient to the modern American woman, when in fact they demonstrated a huge capacity to convert their subservience into female validation and power. They provide inspiration for women to continue to follow what they believe to be correct, despite the obstacles encountered. Their "final vows" represent a rare commitment that runs deeper than adherence to a formalized, hierarchical structure -- a commitment to Christianity, to each other, and to the rest of us living in (and trying to make sense out of) the modern world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II CITED

Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. December 7, 1965. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference.
Deals with the human condition in today's world; human dignity, community, and activity in the universe; role of the Church, marriage and family, culture, economic and social life, politics, and peace (Schraner, 1981:410)

Lumen Gentium: Constitution of the Church. November 21, 1964. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference.
Deals with the Mystery of the Church, the people of God, the episcopate, the laity, holiness within the Church, religious life, eschatology, the Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church (Schraner, 1981:408).

Perfectae Caritatis: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the Religious Life. October 28, 1965. Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference.
Principles for the renewal of religious life, forms of contemplative and apostolic life; lay religious life, secular institutions, vows, communal life, organisms created to bring about reform (Schraner, 1981:409).

Venite Seorsum: Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns. August 15, 1969.
Congregation for Religious. United States Catholic Conference.
Instructions issued after Vatican II to legislate norms regulating the enclosure of contemplative nuns.

APPENDIX B

ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

The Sisters of Compassion

- SC1: Biography of the Irish foundress of the Sisters of Compassion, 1978. Dublin, Ireland: Dublin Diocesan Office for Causes.
 - SC2: Biography of the American foundress of the Sisters of Compassion. 1973. (published by the sisters)
 - SC3: Biography of the American foundress of the Sisters of Compassion, 1902. Boston: Marlier and Company, Ltd.
 - SC4: History of the first 100 years of the Sisters of Compassion (published by the sisters)
 - SC5: Pamphlet describing the work of the Sisters of Compassion, 1991.
 - SC6: The Customs and Minor Regulations of the Sisters of Compassion
 - SC7: Memoirs of one of the sisters
 - SC8: Records of the Sisters of Compassion (membership and departures by year)
 - SC9: Undated pamphlet giving advice to high school girls
 - SC10: Biographical sketch of the Irish foundress, 1978 pamphlet
 - SC11: History of the Sisters in the Crimean War. 1964. Cork, Ireland: The Mercier Press.
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The Solemnites

- SN1: History of the founding of the Solemnites, 1986, published by the sisters.
- SN2: Undated history of the monastery.

- SN3: A compilation of the history, origin, aims, and observances of the Solemnites and a compilation of prayers. Undated. Published by the order.
- SN4: Pamphlet describing the works of the Solemnites. Undated.
- SN5: Guide for exploring scripture readings. November, 1993. Mystic, Conn: Twenty-Third Publications.
- SN6: Powers, Isaias, C.P. 1993. Come and See Jesus. Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications.
- SN7: Calendar of Holy Days - 1994 published by the Solemnites.
- SN8: Order of the Day: Daily Schedule of the Solemnites

Other:

SCSN1: Diocesan Catholic Directory, 1992-93

APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY

<u>Active orders</u>	Synonymous with apostolic orders
<u>Affirmations</u>	Nominations given in support of sisters chosen to run for office
<u>Altar Bread</u>	Bread which is consecrated for use during Mass to represent the body of Christ (also referred to as communion hosts)
<u>Apostolate</u>	Designated goals, work, or mission of religious orders, usually referring to work done in the outside world
<u>Apostolic Orders</u>	Religious orders who work in the outside world; for women this traditionally meant those living a life of partial cloister but whose mission involves work in the outside world
<u>ASC</u>	Association for Contemplative Sisters formed in 1969, a social support and networking group never formally recognized by the Vatican
<u>Chapter of Faults</u>	Ceremony during which self-accusations are confessed to the Mother Superior in the presence of the community for any external or public fault against the vow of obedience, charity, their rule, or any neglect of duty (some orders held this monthly)
<u>Charism</u>	The underlying meaning/ideology supporting the work undertaken by members of religious orders
<u>Choir sister</u>	Pre-Vatican II category for the sister who was better educated and could hold office (for active sisters, those who held professional jobs)

<u>Cloister</u>	From the Latin, "claustrum," meaning "closed up;" to seclude from the world; also designating material obstacles marking bounds of property, the space reserved for those who enter or live there, and the body of ecclesiastical laws relative to both of the above; "active cloister" refers to prohibitions against leaving the monastery; "passive cloister" refers to prohibitions against outsiders entering the monastery (based on Chapter 66 of the Rule of St. Benedict for monks)
<u>Contemplative Nuns</u>	Those female religious orders who live a life of prayer and penance, adhering to traditional cloistral regulations
<u>Convent</u>	From the Latin "conventus," to come together; designates traditional housing of nuns
<u>Divine Office</u>	Prayers recited at specified times daily, either in community or individually
<u>Enclosure</u>	See "cloister"
<u>Extern Sister</u>	Contemplative sister given the charge of leaving the monastery for purposes designated by her superior
<u>Formation</u>	Formal training of sisters carried out in a special school called a "novitiate"
<u>General Chapter</u>	Level of government comprised of member representatives elected by the membership
<u>Generalate</u>	Organization comprised of several different regional communities belonging to the same order and sharing governance
<u>Grace</u>	Derived from the Latin, "gracia," (favor, charm, thanks), meaning spiritual blessings or divine assistance given to man for his regeneration or sanctification; i.e., "state of grace" means a state of sanctification

<u>Habit</u>	Traditional garb of religious orders, following general guidelines set by the Vatican but adapted by individual religious orders
<u>Horarium</u>	Daily schedule adhered to by communities of religious orders
<u>Intercession</u>	To intercede; act of offering prayers and devotions to God for the blessings these impart upon those who are suffering or sinning in the world
<u>Junior Professed</u>	Sister who has taken first vows but has not as yet taken final or perpetual vows
<u>Lay Sister</u>	Pre-Vatican II category of sister who did domestic work
<u>LCWR</u>	Leadership Conference of Women Religious; national organization founded in 1956 of the chief governing officers of American religious communities in active orders
<u>Mistress of Novices</u>	Sister in charge of the training of young postulants and novices; later referred to as Formation Director
<u>Mother General</u>	Title of the head of a religious order; sometimes referred to as Superior General, now referred to as "President"
<u>Mother Superior</u>	Superior of an individual convent
<u>Nominations</u>	Work assignments designated for active sisters on an annual basis before Vatican II
<u>Novice</u>	One who has taken first vows and is in the process of training before taking final vows
<u>Novitiate</u>	Training school for novices

<u>Nun</u>	May have been derived from the Latin, "nuntio," meaning "to announce;" traditionally referred to cloistered women but later used interchangeably with the word "sister" to denote women who have taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as members of a religious order
<u>Particular Friendships</u>	Close personal relationships between sisters which were not encouraged
<u>Penance</u>	Act of self-denial, mortification, or devotion to show sorrow or repentance for sin
<u>Perpetual Vows</u>	Final vows, revocation of which requires papal approval (laicization)
<u>Pontifical Status</u>	Status afforded to some religious orders by virtue of having their own hierarchies but reporting directly to Rome, rather than to diocesan bishops
<u>Postulant</u>	Newly entered sister
<u>Professed Sister</u>	One who has taken perpetual (final) vows
<u>Provincials</u>	Intermediate office; sister who was the head of a regional area comprised of several communities of the same order
<u>Refectory</u>	Diningroom
<u>Religious</u>	Noun used to refer to both male and female members of religious orders; denotes both singular and plural
<u>Sister</u>	Traditionally, a member of an apostolic (or active) order; the word is now used interchangeably with the word "nun"
<u>Small Leaves</u>	List of permissions asked of the Superior for use of small items within the community as a reminder of the vow of poverty
<u>Superior General</u>	See Mother General

Touriere (Fr.) Sister who guarded the door of the cloistered convent from the inside ("tyler" in English)

Vocation From the Latin "vocare" (to call); divine calling to a person to enter into the religious life

Witness One who gives attestation or testimony to; that is, public affirmation by word or example of religious faith or conviction

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name of Order: _____ Date: _____
Age at Entrance: _____ Place: _____
Years as Nun: _____ Time: _____

- I. BACKGROUND
Why did you enter the convent?
What did you see as the advantages of this way of life?
Any role models involved?
- II. EDUCATION
Where did you attend school; what are your professional degrees?
- III. TRAINING
Please explain the Novitiate period and your years in training.
- IV. VOWS
Please explain your vows and the procedure leading up to the taking of final vows.
- V. JOBS
What were your choices?
What kinds of jobs have you done in the past?
What are you doing at present?
- VI. CONVENT LIFE (pre-Vatican II)
Tell me what it was like before Vatican II.
Please describe your daily activities.
What kinds of concerns did you have?
- VII. VATICAN II
How did you feel about Vatican II and the changes?
How did you feel about so many nuns leaving?
How did these changes affect your own order and the sisters you knew?
Did your behavior change? your view of yourself?
How did you feel about dropping the habit?
Did you ever consider leaving yourself? If so, why?
Why did you decide to remain?

VIII. PERSONAL

How would you describe yourself?
What books do you enjoy reading? films, activities?
Do you have any hobbies?

IX. COMMUNITY

What is life like now?
What contacts do you have with your community?
Discuss living arrangements.
(If living in community, what kinds of get-togethers do you have? Do you have rules to follow during meals, etc.? If not living together: do you see other members of your community frequently? Do you get together for social or religious events?)

X. POLITICAL VIEWS

What is your opinion on issues facing women today?
For example, abortion, birth control, sexual harassment and/or discrimination?
How about the role of women in the Church? Should there be women priests?
How would you characterize yourself politically?
How do you feel about the women's movement? The ideas of feminism?

XI. FUTURE OF THE NUN

How do you see the future of the Catholic nun?
What should the role of nun be today?
(within the institution; within society?)
Any concerns about retirement?
What direction should the Church take today with regard to involvement in secular affairs?
How will your own order be affected in the future?