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Review: 'Building Sisterhood: A Feminist History of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary'

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setting. The book would be valuable for an undergraduate course in church history to communicate the flavor of this period of the Counter-reformation from a Protestant perspective. In a graduate course in the history of spirituality the book would fill a *lacuna* in terms of primary sources in seventeenth-century Protestant spirituality.

Cardinal Stritch University

DANIEL DICOMIZIO

Building Sisterhood: A Feminist History of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. By Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan. Women and Gender in North American Religions, Amanda Porterfield and Mary Farrell Bednarowski, series eds. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997. xxix + 392 pages.

In *Building Sisterhood*, fourteen members of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary community of Monroe, Michigan (IHM), produced the thirteen essays which constitute this feminist history of their religious community. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, the book includes contributions from chemists, English professors, a physicist/mathematician, a psychologist, an economist, social activists, archivists, theologians. Many of the authors have also served the IHM community in leadership roles. Margaret Susan Thompson, a historian of U.S. Catholic women religious, acted as consultant and provides an introduction and brief "context" essays to open the four major sections, which organize the IHM contributions.

The first section, "Groundings," includes three essays that trace the controverted origins of the Michigan IHM community and its spiritual identity. M. Theresa Maxis Duchemin, a woman of color, with the Redemptorist, Louis Florent Gillet, established the Monroe community (1845). Difficulties with the bishop led to her resignation as superior, departure from the community (1859), and eventual omission from accounts of the community's origins until 1948. Mother Mary Joseph Walker "refounded" and led the order from 1859 until her 1864 death, under the strict guidance of the Reverend Edward Joos, the superior until his death in 1901. These early conflicts with episcopal authority and their founder's erasure from communal memory receive frequent mention. Despite Maxis's departure, her prayer life, shaped by a Liguorian piety, grounded the community's spiritual life. The second and longest section, "The IHM Life Cycle," composed of five essays, treats the socialization of sisters through novitiate practices, routinization of daily life, and dress from 1860 to 1960; official positions on particular friendships and actual practices of "persistent friendships"; and community care for sisters who suffered physical ailments and mental illness. The third section, "Authority, Leadership, and Governance," first describes the successful duo of Mother Ruth Hankerd, IHM and Sister Miriam Raymo, IHM who oversaw a multimillion dollar building project in the depths of the depression, and then offers an insightful analysis of failure, the attempt of a Representative Assembly to govern the community (1972-75). The last section, "The Ministry of Education," delineates the community's leadership role in the Sister Formation Movement. It features

Sister Mary Patrick Riley, who led the congregation as an educator, yet died isolated, unable to rejoice in her own or her community's accomplishments. Finally it traces the rise and fall of Detroit's Immaculata High School.

Each of these essays no doubt speaks volumes to members of the IHMs of Monroe. They also speak to those interested in the history of women who find here aspirations achieved through ingenuity, talent, and dedication and hopes denied by prevailing patriarchal forces. One also finds examples of women directing other women to expand their horizons as educators, intellectuals, care givers, leaders, builders, and institutional authorities.

The volume's diversity of authorship does not mean incoherence. Rather it is the product of a four-year collaborative process (1990-94) of a Monroe IHM group identified as COR, i.e., Claiming Our Roots. Collaboration involved choice of major topics and authorship of specific essays as well as the reading and critiquing of each other's writing. The process is evident in each essay's clarity and the compatibility of styles. The use of feminist analysis serves as a corrective to hagiographical histories of religious orders. It attunes the historian to constructions of gender which significantly influence the self-identity of women religious relative to the larger Church institution and to the society in which they live.

The use of feminist analysis, however, is not entirely effective in this history. It seems to be appended to the introduction or conclusion of some essays rather than be fully integrated. Assertions of "partriarchy" or a "patriarchal church" state the obvious with little analysis of the broader prevailing social influences or the complex relationship of religious orders to the ecclesial institution which indeed constrained communities yet also provided the context for their flourishing. The relationship between members' personal autonomy and their community identification also remains unclear. It would have been useful to analyze how perceptions of individual autonomy and communal identity changed over time. More demographic data would have provided a clearer sense of who made up this community over its century and a half. While such information is not entirely absent, it is not clear how ethnicity and class played specific and changing roles in the community's history, except that sisters were warned not to mention nationality.

The volume does, in the final analysis, raise important questions and offers insight into several aspects of U.S. Catholic history. These include the contributions of people of color within U.S. Catholicity and the bigotry of many Catholics as found in the story of Mother Theresa Maxis; the ambiguous roles assigned to women in the Church which expected their submission as women yet expected their pioneering leadership as educators, administrators, and religious guides. It recovers interesting stories of women who dedicated their lives to building their community out of love for God and neighbor. The text also offers a model for doing history in certain uncharted areas of U.S. Catholic women's history. I recommend *Building Sisterhood* to those interested in the history of women and religion and those enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses in U.S. Catholic Church history. This account of the educational contribution of one congregation of women religious would greatly enrich such a course.