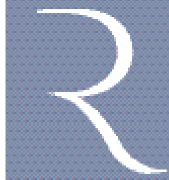

consecrated life stories

The Impact of Women Religious on the Church of New York

On a spring day in 2008, I stood in the majestic St. Patrick's Cathedral amid representatives of the 116 congregations of women religious serving in the archdiocese of New York. In the processional hymn, Benedictine Sister Delores Dufner's "Sing a New Church," we sang "summoned by the God who made us, rich in our diversity, gathered in the name of Jesus, richer still in unity." These words of struggle, promise, and affirmation can only hint the reality of women religious in dioceses all through the United States. Our story is indeed a rich and diverse one, focused in a grand unity.[1]

The year 2008 marks the bicentennial of the establishment of four dioceses—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Bardstown (Kentucky)—and Baltimore's designation as an archdiocese. The church in New York serves two and a half million Catholics in ten counties, from the urban density of Manhattan and the Bronx, to an underserved rural population in the north. The story of this diocese, like dioceses everywhere, is inseparable from the story of its women religious.[2] The bicentennial invited us all to reimagine our story within the story of larger social and ecclesial movements, movements we helped shape and were shaped by.

Let me suggest an image. Our seminary's excellent library holds many books about religious congregations and provinces connected with this archdiocese. Some use the pious, purple prose of the glory days, others pack a more modern, journalistic punch. But they all tell how communities came here, what needs confronted them, and what they did about those needs. Imagine all those volumes on the shelves, flanked by histories of the church in this country and region, bolstered by studies of the many immigrants who came here and by surveys on education, public health, child care, human services, pastoral ministry, catechesis, lay leadership, spiritual formation, race relations, community development, advocacy and action for peace and justice, environmental concerns, and global awareness. Now imagine all those volumes in conversation with one another, comparing, connecting, cross-referencing. Only an eavesdropper on all of those conversations could write the full story of women religious, the meta-story that cries out to be told in each diocese and in the country at large.

My purpose here is modest. I speak not as an historian but as a theologian and spiritual director who tries to listen both to a person's story and to the story underneath the story. I listen to hear what is "happening" and what is "really going on." I propose to apply those

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questions to the stories of women religious in this and, mutatis mutandis, other dioceses.[3] What was happening during those many years? And what was "really going on"? In other words, how was God at work in it?

Measuring Impact

First, a word about the meaning of "impact." For New Yorkers, the searing memory of 11 September 2001, of giant planes crashing into the World Trade Center's towers, forever colors the word's meaning. Yet over its lifetime this city, like most others, has absorbed the impact of many other traumatic events—epidemics from yellow fever, cholera, and influenza to HIV/AIDS; fires and floods; riots and gang wars; economic upheavals and financial despair; wartime anxiety and loss on the home front.

How do we measure impact? I suggest we measure impact by the tributes of a society.

How do we measure impact? In New York City, where real estate rules and media coverage makes you or breaks you, some judge impact in terms of stone and steel, of buildings constructed, renovated, retrofitted. Some measure impact by best sellers and column inches, by prime-time coverage and website hits. Others measure impact in the flesh-and-blood realities of bodies blessed and bandaged, minds mentored, hearts healed, spirits sustained. Impact is about relationships as much as headlines. I suggest we measure impact by the tributes of a society, like the tens of thousands who lined the streets in 1896 to honor the passing of Sister of Charity Mary Irene Fitzgibbon, founder of the New York Foundling and conscience of a city.[4]

Impact is measured in the halls of Congress by Sister Patricia Cruise SC and Sister Mary Rose McGeady DC testifying about the runaway youth served by Covenant House; by the words of Sisters Patricia Wolf RSM, Regina Murphy SC, and Arlene Flaherty OP, whose advocacy on behalf of justice in shareholder meetings and public forums has heralded the Gospel in our day; by the luminous theological writings of Sister Elizabeth Johnson CSJ; by Sister Theresa Kane RSM calling in 1979 on Pope John Paul II to hear the desire of women to participate fully in the church; and by the gunshots that murdered Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke MM and Ita Ford MM in 1980 in El Salvador and Sister Barbara Ford SC in 2001 in Guatemala; by the vision of Mother Irene Gill OSU, who in 1904 began the College of New Rochelle, the first Catholic college for women in New York State, and Mother Butler RSHM, who opened Marymount College in Tarrytown in 1907; by the steadfast peace witness of women like Sister Anne Montgomery RSCJ and Sister Eileen Storey SC in Iraq and the West Bank.

Even this hard-to-impress city recognizes the impact of these exceptional women. Yet they would be the first to protest that the vast majority of their sisters, the thousands of women religious who have served the people of New York, have lived equally extraordinary lives, only in a less public sphere. The everyday impact of their faithfulness has been felt for generations by families, neighborhoods, parishes, and institutions that never make the headlines.

What Was Happening?

The Catholic historian Gary Macy describes history as "the stories that we tell ourselves so that we know bet-

ter how we got to be who we are."[5] Before I address what was happening, let me make a few introductory remarks. It behooves us to tell the whole story, all of it, because that helps us to see who we are now and to believe we can be still better. We need to include the shadow as well as the light. We were instruments of social grace and social sin. We were victims of prejudice and injustice, but we were perpetrators as well. Until recently, women religious have not been telling our story well. Why not? One reason is that a certain understanding of the virtue of humility has conditioned us to be hesitant about promoting ourselves. Another reason might be that our entertainment-hungry, attention-deficient culture seems able to hear only a particularly loud voice.

To tell what was happening, we might consider chapter headings like these for our story:

- Some Came and Stayed, Some Passed Through and Left Their Mark
- With Their Own Blood, Sweat, Tears— and Money
- "Open a Hospital? But We Thought You Wanted Us to Teach"
- They Don't Trust Catholics, but They Want Sisters' Care When They're Injured
- How Many Communities in This Diocese? Only God Knows!

Some of our communities started here on the bedrock of this ever-changing place. Most were seedlings transplanted from elsewhere into its stubborn soil. All soon found themselves irrevocably transformed. Some came to New York and moved on, up and down the Atlantic coast, or west, into the heartland and frontier. Some came and stayed here. There was always plenty of work to do here, no matter when they came.

We can imagine a common story line that begins with a letter something like this:

> Reverend Mother Superior:
> We beg you to send Sisters to take care of [one or more of the following kinds of needy persons]: orphans, uneducated, sick poor, abandoned infants, girls working as domestics who are being seduced by their employers, youngsters needing to learn a trade, elderly folks, homeless, families at risk, immigrants who can't speak the language, people hungry for food and knowledge, Catholics who need to be counted and catechized.
>
> Please come yourself if you can, Mother, or at least send us your best workers—the strongest, the brightest, the most fearless. We need you desperately.
>
> Respectfully yours,
> Bishop or Pastor or Trustee

Also part of the story line, though rarely found written down in the letters, are facts and observations like these: • Never mind that the house won't be ready for you. You'll probably have to count on the hospitality of another community until you find your own. • We can't promise you much money—you'll have to raise most of it yourself. • You may end up as martyrs to cholera, dysentery, influenza, tuberculosis, and violence and to the poverty of the poor you came to serve. • You may find that the demands of your work make it hard, even impossible, to live your Rule, your way of living and praying that you cherish so deeply.[6]

What was happening? Two hundred years ago, in 1808, John Carroll was breathing a sigh of relief, after a fashion. Since 1789 he had been bishop of the one diocese in the U.S.A, a territory that stretched from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and from Canada to the Spanish Floridas. Now Baltimore was named an arch-

diocese, and Carroll's pastoral burden was lessened by the creation of four suffragan dioceses.[7]

The New York diocese comprised all of New York State and part of New Jersey. The 80,000 inhabitants of New York included about 14,000 Catholics, mostly Irish, with some French and Germans, served by one Catholic parish, St. Peter's, on Barclay Street. In 1808 the non-Catholic majority of New Yorkers viewed the parish with disdain, and its mostly poor, immigrant congregation as uncouth, dirty, and decidedly lacking in proper religious sensibility.

Also in 1808 a young widow was about to leave New York. She was a convert, and Catholic Baltimore seemed infinitely more hospitable than her native city, where the disdain could be hostile. I speak of Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, saint of New York. We cannot tell the story of women religious in this archdiocese without her, though she never lived here as a religious. The school she began in Baltimore became the catalyst for a new religious community. In July 1809, on donated land in Emmitsburg, in the Maryland hills, she (a Catholic for only four years) began the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's. It was the first active women's congregation founded in and native to the United States. Elizabeth and her advisers modeled it on the noncloistered Daughters of Charity founded by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac in 17th-century France, but they adapted the Rule to the circumstances and needs of 19th-century America. The language and faces changed, but many of those needs remain today.

To the Ursulines belongs the distinction of being the first women religious in the New World. They came to Canada in 1639 and to French New Orleans in 1727. Twelve nuns came from France to nurse, but soon found themselves teaching, caring for orphans, and working with wayward women. One of their novices wrote home: "We are determined not to spare ourselves in anything that will be for the greater glory of God."[8] Some Ursulines from Ireland came to New York in 1812, began a school that lasted only three years, and then returned home.

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In 1817, nine years after the diocese was established, Mother Seton yielded to the pleas of New York Catholics and sent, as a gift to her home church, three sisters to care for orphans in what was then St. Patrick's Cathedral parish on Mott and Prince Streets. At that time Catholics numbered about 20,000. Concerning the New York Catholics, Mother Seton wrote: "So much must depend . . . on who is sent to my 'native city' they say, not knowing that I am a citizen of the world."[9]

Soon demands for sisters increased, as they were to do again and again in all our stories. Mother Seton had her native New York pegged: "so distracted a place." Later correspondents would be even more grim in their description of the poverty, filth, and violence of the city in which sisters sought to teach, nurse, or care for orphans. A later bishop, John Hughes, known to friend and foe alike as "Dagger John," would call New York "Babylon the Great."

An estimated one-seventh of the city's population of 15,000 depended on public relief in the winter of 1817. By 1820, health and housing issues in the city

were critical. In the economic slump after the War of 1812, a huge influx of immigrants and annual yellow-fever epidemics created what amounted to a continuous state of emergency.[10]

In 1827 Bishop John Dubois wrote that his flock included about 30,000 mostly poor Catholics, and complained that property in New York was very expensive. That same year several Religious of the Sacred Heart stopped in New York en route to St. Louis. In 1841 their congregation would return for good as the city's second religious community of women when Mother Aloysia Hardey opened on Houston and Mulberry Streets an academy that would later move to Astoria.

Catholic-and-immigrant is a recurring theme. In 1785, when St. Peter's Church was dedicated, people said the pastor needed to be fluent in six languages—English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Irish—to serve his two hundred parishioners. Today Mass is celebrated in thirty-three languages in the New York archdiocese, and most large urban dioceses report similar statistics.

The numbers of Irish and German immigrants coming in the 1830s brought strong anti-Catholic feeling to the surface. In 1836 *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* was published, a slanderous account of cruelty and abuse in a Montreal nunnery. The falsity of it did nothing to keep it from becoming the best-selling American book before *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*[11] Across the country, fear of immigrants and foreigners went together with a virulent opposition to Catholicism. The 1834 burning of an Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, was but one expression of anti-Catholic hatred. Yet, in the face of such rabid Nativist prejudice, over and over it was sisters—nursing, teaching, risking their lives for the poor—who gradually tempered society's perception of the church and of its immigrant flock.

By 1848 one-third of New York's population was foreign born, swelled by thousands of Irish desperate to escape the terrible famine in their homeland. The eighty-two women religious in the diocese included a new group, the Sisters of Mercy. Mother M. Agnes O'Connor and six Sisters from Dublin, the "walking nuns," visited the sick in their homes, taught adults, took in young women seeking to escape from prostitution, and visited prisons. Mother Seton's daughter Catherine became one of their first postulants. In 1849 a cholera epidemic killed five thousand New Yorkers. In November of that year, the diocese's first Catholic hospital, St. Vincent's, opened with thirty beds, five doctors, and four Sisters of Charity.

By 1855 New York City was known as the largest Irish city in the world and the third largest German city.

The needs of a rapidly expanding Catholic population prompted Rome to carve new dioceses from the see of New York: in 1847 Albany and Buffalo, and in 1853 Brooklyn (including all of Long Island) and Newark (including all of New Jersey). The area of the diocese of New York, named an archdiocese in 1850, had shrunk to one-tenth of its original size, but its people had grown to more than three hundred times its original number, between 300,000 and 400,000 Catholics.[12] By 1855 over half of New York City's population was foreign born. It was known as the largest Irish city in the world and the

third largest German city.

In 1867 the Good Shepherd Sisters took in 275 young women who had been coerced into a life of prostitution. Many of them were domestics whose employers had, in polite terms, ruined their reputations. Another 500 had to be turned away. In 1869 Sister Mary Irene Fitzgibbon SC opened the New York Foundling asylum. By the time of her death in 1896, this pioneer Catholic child-welfare agency had cared for 28,000 infants and many pregnant unwed and working mothers as well.

By 1885 women religious supervised most of New York's child-welfare system, with more than eighty percent of its dependent children in their care. The New York Foundling (Sisters of Charity) and the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin (Sisters of St. Francis), the two largest institutions—along with those operated by Sisters of Mercy, of Divine Compassion, of Notre Dame, of the Good Shepherd, and others—provided a safe and caring environment for approximately 15,000 children.[13]

As needs grew, so did the religious work force. By 1875 there were about a thousand Catholic sisters in New York City. In ten years the number doubled. Child welfare was a major social problem. According to 1904 statistics, New York City harbored one-third of all institutionalized and dependent children *in the whole country*. At the beginning of the 20th century, the archdiocese included 42 national parishes that served 11 different ethnic groups. By 1911 women religious had founded three Catholic colleges for women: the Ursulines' College of New Rochelle (1904), the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary's Marymount College (1907), and the Sisters of Charity's College of Mount St. Vincent (1911).

In 1939, when Francis Spellman became New York's archbishop, this local church had over 2,500 priests, 10,000 nuns, and two million members. (It was also $26 million in debt.)[14]

What was happening? After World War II, in most U.S. religious congregations, there was a peak period of growth that lasted until the late 1960s. Those boom years and the winds of change that Vatican Council II set swirling deserve fuller analysis and reflection than is possible here.[15]

What Was "Really Going On"?

I turn now to my second question: Amid all the facts and statistics in the story of women religious, what was "really going on" in, with, through, and even in spite of what was happening? How was and is God's work evident?

I asked a few lay colleagues to describe the impact of women religious. A female pastoral associate responded, "Women religious have paved the way for the rest of us." A male theology professor replied that religious "have been gatekeepers of religious information, vital to identity formation." And from a male sociology professor: "Women religious have helped us rethink our world and understand that mission is local and global."

Some might find meaning in the story of New York's women religious by charting a trajectory: • from assimilation to accompaniment, • from competition to collaboration, • from convent lifestyles of cookie-cutter conformity to distinguishable diversity, • from provincialism to global connection, • from presence in institutions to presence to issues of our day.

For others, the story of women religious in New York is a story of collective self-awakening that parallels the major social movements of the past two centuries,

for example, from being the church's cheap labor force to being "catalysts to conscience."[16]

What was "really going on"? How was the Spirit present in our blind spots and flashes of light, in our so-called successes and so-called failures? What signs of God's moving and shaking, God's transforming energy and grace, can we notice?

Underneath the narrative, faith always senses a deeper story, marked with the signs of God's pervasive presence. That story speaks of risk, of courage, of loss, and of love that transcends loss. It reveals themes of faithfulness, of relationship, of witness, and of power. It is a story much bigger than that of any one religious community.

In assessing the impact of women religious, assessing what was "really going on," I offer four replies: (1) *Faithfulness was (and is) going on.* In the lives of the women named earlier in this article, faithfulness wore a highly public face. It shaped thought, molded institutions, awakened conscience, crafted public policy, acted and spoke out against ignorance, war, and poverty and for education, compassion, peace, and justice. Margaret John Kelly DC speaks of our legacy of "charity embracing justice," a legacy that "generated energy as it moved from the hovels and points of entry in the 19th century to the halls and courts of power in our 21st century."[17] In their fierce fidelity, some among us are impelled by the Spirit to make private pain a public issue. In the lives of most of us, faithfulness takes a more ordinary form.

(2) *Relationship was (and is) going on.* For example, there were relationships with the laity. Lay benefactors often saw needs more clearly than ecclesiastics did. Catholic and Protestant laywomen invited the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to minister to prostitutes in New York's prisons and almshouses in 1857. (Some while earlier, Archbishop Hughes would not acknowledge the fact of prostitution among Irish immigrant women.)[18]

From the earliest days, women religious knew that we could never carry out our mission alone, even though we sometimes pretended that we could. New York's first parish schools were begun by lay people, who soon invited sisters and brothers to staff them. The same was true in the first orphanages and hospitals, where lay managers, physicians, and clinicians supervised—and sometimes locked horns with—the sisters who served there. Before long, sisters assumed leadership of those same institutions and shaped them into vital providers of service in society. In our day, relationships are shifting again. Today, as they seek new ways to be in partnership for the sake of the mission, religious and the laity depend on each other as never before.

There were and are relationships with non-Catholics. Again and again, by their heroic behavior in epidemics, wars, and disasters, women religious won over the very Nativists and Know-Nothings who had vilified them. A prominent WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant), Mr. Edwards Pierpont, exemplified the change of heart that sisters wrought. During the Civil War he told the Secretary of War that he wanted only a certain community of sisters to staff a military hospital in New York's Central Park, because they were "the most faithful nurses in the world."

There were and are relationships among and between religious communities. In the early years, one arriving community after another was greeted with hospitality rather than aloofness or competitiveness by those already established here. In New York's urban vineyard,

with plenty of work to be done, there were always too few laborers. In 1889, with the blessing of Pope Pius IX, Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini and six Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart came to New York to work with Italian orphans. No one knew anything about the convent they had been promised, so they spent their first night in a rundown rooming house. The Sisters of Charity took them in until a house hastily rented by a benefactor was ready.

Unfortunately, that sisterly spirit could and often did yield to smug self-sufficiency. Rivalries, turf battles, and isolating rules kept members incommunicado from other congregations. Perhaps our large numbers and institutional presence during the peak years 1940-1969 inflated our corporate egos and narrowed our vision. Certainly, much of pre-Vatican II Catholic theology did little to dispose us to build bridges of understanding beyond boundaries. Today, happily, collaboration is a way of life for women religious. In theory and in practice, we know that "none of us is as smart as all of us."

(3) *Witness was (and is) going on.* Witness, intentionally directed towards others, about what should be and against what should not be if God's dream is to be realized, expresses religious life's prophetic vocation. From our first days in this archdiocese, the not-so-subtle subtext of our lives was: "Look. See. Pay attention. The poor are always among us—not invisible, not forgotten."

The women religious who pioneered child-care institutions in the late 19th century did more than mother countless orphans and foundlings. In a society that wanted to punish the poor for their poverty and ostracize unmarried women for their sexual conduct, they aligned themselves with the least ones. Their actions of compassion witnessed to the worth and dignity of every human being. Today our witness is the same: it is not about ourselves. It is about people in need, whether here or far away, in cardboard shacks on city streets or in huts with dirt floors in faraway parts of the world. "With whom do you believe your lot is cast?" asks the poet Adrienne Rich.[19] Our answer has been clear: the least of Christ's sisters and brothers.

(4) *Power was (and is) going on.* Interwoven with our stories are stories of power used and abused, for good and for ill. We have been agents and victims of power, subjects and objects of power. In our liminal status as neither clerics nor laypersons, we walk a fine line. As public persons in the church, we are subject to more sanctions and less freedom than the laity. Like them, we are closed off from much decision-making where we could exercise power for appropriate change. More than once we have given over our power and colluded with unjust social and ecclesial structures.

Diminishment, not power, seems the overriding theme in conversations about religious life today.

Diminishment, not power, seems the overriding theme in conversations about religious life today. But it is hardly the whole story. Our Catholic heritage gives us other angles from which to view the reality. We should look clearly and sensitively at things seen, but also in faith be sensitive to things unseen. The cold hard facts of the past forty years—declining numbers, more women dying than entering, the rising median age, retirement expenses, and cherished ministries sold, merged, or lost—do not tell the whole story, any more

than the success and solidity of the 1940s and 1950s captured the whole story.

The key question is: What wisdom have we learned from the success and the suffering that have been part of every stage of our existence? (And how do believers measure success anyway?) As one congregational leader asked, "Do life's traumatic events serve as catalysts for transformation or stagnation in our religious congregations?"[20] What does all of it have to do with the mystery of dying and rising with Christ, the mystery of transformation, that is the core of being Christian believers? In our beginnings, struggles, growth, and letting go, how have we tasted grace?

Questions like these can move us to imagine an alternate view. We have claimed, explicitly and unapologetically, power to create and re-create, to realize God's dream, in imitation and remembrance of the Jesus whom we vow to follow. We have used power to make a difference in people's lives, to bring about change in society. Pope Benedict XVI recognized this in his address last year to U.S. Catholic educators: "Countless dedicated religious sisters, brothers, and priests together with selfless parents have, through Catholic schools, helped generations of immigrants to rise from poverty and take their place in mainstream society."[21] We have used power to translate dreams and imaginings into buildings and behaviors, programs and policies; to shape the spiritual sensibilities of a people; to build relationships, widen the circle, and bring others to the table.

This Spirit-story of power fought for and claimed, energy released and transformed, gifts shared and multiplied, is the story of women religious. From what source do we draw this power? Does our deep life in God have anything to do with our story, with our impact? The answer may be obvious to us in religious life, but it needs to be voiced unambiguously.

Not long ago Doris Gottemoeller RSM said of women religious, "We struggle to make our daily efforts transparent to the love of God which animates us and the hope that guides us into the future."[22] It is "the love of God which animates us," and it is that love alone which gives us the heart and energy of our committed response.

I began with two questions: What was happening? And what was really going on? The course of these remarks has led me to two different but related ways of posing those questions, namely, With whom do we believe our lot is cast? And from where have we drawn our strength?

Indeed, women religious in the church of New York and elsewhere have written a long scroll of faithfulness. We have aided people everywhere. The faithful witness of our efforts has changed public perception of religion and shaped public discourse about charity and justice. But our impact is most authentically measured, I believe, not by the visible standards of institutional presence or even the calculus of service, but rather in the incalculable, invisible source of our energy and service, the passionate presence of God in us, the deep wellsprings of Spirit-life from which we live. No words, no story, can tell how God in us has touched our hearts and the hearts of others, and changed our world for the better.

Matthew 25 makes it clear: it is love that matters. Surely, that final revealing of all that was obscure and hidden, that final tally of impact, will tell the story of women religious and their love—their immense, faithful, relational, witnessing, and powerful love—lived from deep within the heart of God.

Notes

[1] This article is adapted from an address given at St. Ignatius Loyola Parish in New York, 3 April 2008, in a series commemorating the archdiocese's 200th anniversary. Speakers were asked: "To what next step, to what new place, are women religious and our local church being invited? What would the future look like through the eyes of your foundress?"

[2] About 2,900 professed women religious live and minister in the archdiocese of New York.

[3] Though this article focuses on New York, it is easily applicable to other dioceses.

[4] Readers will know similar stories wherever they live.

[5] "Diversity as Tradition: Why the Future of Christianity Is Looking More Like Its Past," Santa Clara Lecture, Santa Clara University, 8 November 2007. http://www.scu.edu/ignatiancenter/events/lectures/index.cfm

[6] For example, the Dominican sisters in Blauvelt, New York, a rural area in the 1880s, could not keep the rule of enclosure because their work with orphans required frequent trips to the New York City courts.

[7] Thomas Spalding, *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1994* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), notes that Carroll did not want to foster a lot of strictly Catholic institutions, but rather "wished the local church to blend imperceptibly into the social fabric" (p. 62). The needs of the growing immigrant Catholic population would soon dictate otherwise.

[8] [Sister Therese Wolfe OSU], *The Ursulines in New Orleans and Our Lady of Prompt Succor: A Record of Two Centuries, 1727-1925* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1925), pp. 199-200.

[9] Elizabeth Seton to Rev. Simon Bruté, 1 August 1817, in *Elizab0eth Bayley Seton Collected Writings*, 4 vols., ed. Regina Bechtle SC and Judith Metz SC; mss. ed., Ellin M. Kelly (New York: New City Press, 2000-2006), vol. 2, p. 494.

[10] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), pp. 8-9 & 19.

[11] See John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

[12] Thomas J. Shelley, *The Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of New York, 1808-2008* (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe, 2007), p. 171.

[13] Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 133.

[14] I am indebted to Maureen Welsh SHCJ for compiling and summarizing many of the statistics used in this article.

[15] See, for example, Lora Ann Quiñonez CDP and Mary Daniel Turner SNDdeN, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[16] Joan Chittister OSB has written that the purpose of religious life is to be "a searing presence, a paradigm of search, a mark of human soul, and a catalyst to conscience in the society in which it emerged."

[17] Margaret John Kelly DC, address to Catholic Charities of New York, 21 February 2008, reported in Catholic New York, 28 February 2008.

[18] See Shelley, *Bicentennial History*, p. 356.

[19] Adrienne Rich, "The Spirit of Place."

[20] Mary Persico IHM, "Welcoming the Storm," LCWR Occasional Papers, Winter 2007.

[21] http://www.zenit.org/article-22328?1=english.

[22] http://www.sistersofmercy.org/popevisit.

Deadheading

Deadheading daffodils
is sad but necessary work.
When the rich yellow trumpet
goes all papery and transparent
it begins to draw life
from the bulb which stores it
for next year's flowering.
So, like a minor executioner,
I lop off heads – snip, snip, snip –
watch them fall haphazardly
to the gentler earth
which gathers up old life
to make it new again.

Bonnie Thurston