

“FOR THE RENEWAL OF POWER STRUCTURES”:  
SOCIOLOGICAL INFLUENCE IN THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN  
WOMEN RELIGIOUS, 1950-1980

by

AMY LYNN KOEHLINGER

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of History  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

June 1996

“‘For the Renewal of Power Structures’: Sociological Influence in the Transformation of American Women Religious, 1950-1980,” a thesis prepared by Amy Lynn Koehlinger in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts degree in the Department of History. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

[Redacted Signature]

---

Dr. Jack P. Maddex, Jr., Chair of the Examining Committee

June 3, 1996  
Date

Committee in Charge:

Dr. Jack P. Maddex, Jr., Chair  
Dr. Barbara Welke  
Dr. Howard Brick

Accepted By: [Redacted Signature]

---

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School



## CURRICULUM VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Amy Lynn Koehlinger

PLACE OF BIRTH: Fort Wayne, Indiana

DATE OF BIRTH: February 27, 1969

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon  
Indiana University

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts in History, 1996, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts in Religious and Studies Political Science, 1991, Indiana  
University

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

United States History  
North American Catholic History  
Radicalism and Social Reform

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of History, University of Oregon, Eugene,  
1995-96

### AWARDS AND HONORS:

Outstanding Major, Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University, 1990  
Wendell Wilkie Award, Political Science Department, Indiana University, 1990  
Senior Achievement Award, Honors Division, Indiana University, 1991

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation to Professor Jack P. Maddex, Jr. for his guidance and assistance throughout this project, and specifically for schooling me in the “trifles of perfection” and patiently challenging me to pursue precision in my work. I thank Prof. Howard Brick for his insight both into American thought and culture of the 1960s, and social change in general. I thank Prof. Barbara Welke for her careful reading and constructive comments on this manuscript. I wish to thank Prof. Robert A. Orsi both for his steadfast mentoring, and for the criticisms he provided at crucial moments in the development of this thesis. I extend special appreciation to each sister who shared her history with me in interviews. I wish to acknowledge and thank Sr. Janice Jackson, SNJM, for the generous encouragement she offered to me. And I thank Sr. Janice and Charles Robinson for their dialogue with me, through all stages of this project, that challenged and sharpened my ideas. I also wish to thank Sr. Lillanna Kopp, SFCC, for her incisive feedback on a topic about which she is most knowledgeable. I am obliged to the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the Benedictine Sisters, and the Sisters of Providence who opened their community archives to me. I am also obliged to archivist Phil Runkel of the Marquette University Archives for organizing and preparing the NCAN and NCCIJ papers for my research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. "AT FIRST WE OBEYED, THEN LATER WE EXPLAINED".....	9
A Study in Contrasts .....	9
Transformation Overview.....	12
III. "SISTERS, BUT NOT OF THE PYRAMID".....	39
The Sociological Context for Women's Renewal.....	39
Hierarchical Transformation and Providence Heights College of Sister Formation .....	51
Collegial Transformation and Community Self-Studies.....	64
Collegial Transformation, Part One: Sisters of Providence and Sociometry .....	65
Collegial Transformation, Part Two: Benedictine Sisters and T-Groups	78
Transformed Authority and Self-Studies.....	85
IV. "FOR THE RENEWAL OF POWER STRUCTURES" .....	86
The Authority Conflict and Its Context.....	87
Hierarchy Rejected.....	91
Hierarchy Mandated .....	96
V. CONCLUSION.....	102
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	106

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the early 1950s Pope Pius XII issued two mandates to Roman Catholic women religious<sup>1</sup> throughout the world: improve the education of sisters, and modernize outdated customs and rules. Though the Holy Father intended only to initiate specific and limited changes among sisters, in the United States each of his mandates precipitated the creation of an institution for sisters and set in motion a process of radical transformation among American sisters. Accelerated by the theological innovations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which challenged previously accepted hierarchical models of power, the transformation process developed a momentum entirely its own, and in the course of twenty years, it brought about significant changes in the ways that sisters dressed, made decisions, corporately organized themselves, interpreted religious vows, understood and wielded power, interacted with the lay world, and chose vocational ministries.

The transformation occurred in two stages: initially, from 1950 through 1965, renewal occurred through hierarchical structures; after 1965 congregations enacted reforms through more egalitarian processes. When in the early 1950s sisters responded to Vatican mandates to modernize educational practices and practical norms within women's orders, they did so by creating hierarchical organizations and organizing conferences of superiors to discuss compliance with Vatican directives. Within these conferences, sister leaders developed channels of communication between orders where previously there had been

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the term "religious" as a noun referring to members of a vowed community, as the term is commonly used within the Catholic context.

relative isolation and silence between women's communities. Sisters discussed common challenges within their orders and developed corporate approaches to the challenges of modernization. They also searched for expertise to guide their self-evaluations, and found it in the fields of sociology and psychology.

The Second Vatican Council introduced a theology of localism into the renewal process, and following Vatican II the locus of sister renewal efforts shifted from national organizations to individual orders and, moreso, to local communities of sisters. Vatican II also injected the idea of "collegiality" into the transformation. Sisters combined collegial ideals with their earlier experience of intercommunity dialogue to democratize transformation processes. Within the more intimate setting of their local community or province, sisters utilized the group process theories and models that had evolved in the social sciences and that were increasingly employed in nonacademic secular spheres. In "small groups" sisters interpreted their experience of religious life and eventually formed new models of leadership, vocation, community decision process, and intracommunity relations. Collegial groups were both a means and an ends in the transition as sisters experimented with self studies to put the concept of collegiality into practice.

Several factors converged to shape the transformation of American women religious. Following the Second World War, Catholics emerged from the periphery of American society to claim a secure position within the middle class.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the young women who joined religious orders during the postwar years perceived their faith as more easily integrated into the public sphere than did sisters who had previously joined congregations of religious when mainstream American culture had tended to view Catholicism with suspicion. Additionally, many post-war postulants entered religious life

---

<sup>2</sup> In American Catholics, James Hennessey characterized this change as a lessened "psychological defensiveness" among American Catholics. James Hennessey, SJ, American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 198), 309.

well-versed in the ideas and ideals of the American middle class.<sup>3</sup> By the middle to late 1960s, sisters were gaining familiarity with antiauthoritarian currents that were emerging in American culture. In the Catholic world, theological innovations manifest in the Second Vatican Council shifted the locus of the transformation from hierarchical structures to local congregations, provided a theological foundation for sisters' alterations to traditional patterns, and created an atmosphere of dynamic possibility throughout the Church as a hospitable context for sister renewal struggles. The Sister Formation Conference's response to Vatican mandates for modernization created the unforeseen consequence of sister empowerment and intracommunity cooperation.

Each of the above factors exerted a specific influence on the transformation. Each contributed unique perspectives that shaped both the structures sisters created and the philosophical justifications they evoked in defense of their new patterns. In this snarl of contingencies and influences one should not overlook the initiative and creativity of sisters themselves throughout the transformation: women religious took risks; they demonstrated courage and perseverance; they invested significant amounts of personal energy and corporate resources toward the task of internally transforming the structures that had long provided them with definite physical and financial security. Though it would be problematic to unravel and isolate the influence of one factor from that of the others, it is possible to identify some places in the story where a particular influence became distinct.

One ubiquitous and potent influence on the transformation was the social and behavioral sciences: distinct threads of sociology and psychology run through virtually all phases of the transformation. It was a subtle influence, however, as it entered the

---

<sup>3</sup> In her 1966 study of American Women Religious sponsored by the Conference of Major Superiors (CMSW), Sr. Marie Augusta Neal documented that a full 20 percent of sisters originated from families where the father's occupation was classified as "professional." Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, SND de Namur, From Nuns to Sisters: An Expanding Vocation (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 32.

transformation through diverse sources, both religious and secular. At the same time that the world of Catholic women religious was entering a stage of rapid transformation, the academic social sciences were discovering a new terrain, and developing new concepts and tools to interpret corporate human relationships. In the late 1940s social psychologists began to explore dynamics within human groups. By the 1950s their work had expanded and diversified into several different paradigms and approaches to this study. Both immediately prior to and following World War II, a number of sociologists explored the nature and effects of different types of authority, concluding that democratic models of leadership were more beneficial for human progress than were authoritarian or laissez-faire models. In the post-war period, further studies dissected different situations of authority, including bureaucracies and "total institutions." At the same time, social psychologists used results from earlier studies of groups to develop specific models of "small groups," in which participants used the group setting to analyze and even alter their own psychological orientation towards others. Theory viewed the small group as a laboratory in which psychologists could observe and even change human behavior. "T-groups" and sociometric tests were two forms of the small-group laboratory.

As the study of human behavior in groups became more sophisticated, spheres outside of the social sciences began to recognize practical applications for the theories of human interaction that were developing within the academic sphere. Throughout the 1950s and especially during the 1960s, business, the federal government, educators, and political activists experimented with T-groups and sensitivity training. The business world, in particular, utilized this research on authority and small groups to develop management strategies. Professional consultants and experts versed in group dynamics emerged to apply sociological theory to specific functional situations.

Sisters, too, incorporated developments in the social sciences into their renewal efforts. In 1959 Richard Cardinal Cushing addressed congregated women superiors with his approval of this infusion of scientific expertise into religious life:

I would be the first to object to comparing the Church to a far-flung business organization. Yet we are forced to admit that the success of the Church in its supernatural mission of saving souls requires the employment of many techniques and psychological methods which business has turned to its own advantage.<sup>4</sup>

Sisters versed in sociology applied sociological critiques of authority models to the inherited hierarchical governing structures of their congregations, and, seeking alternatives, advocated for nonhierarchical governance. Sisters versed in psychology evaluated the factors of institutional religious life that contributed to the psychological health or pathology of the individual sister. The sister organization, the Sister Formation Conference, developed a social-science college curriculum for sisters, and trained young sisters in the ideas and methods of human interaction. Congregations hired secular management consultants to conduct surveys and offer advice on matters relating to bureaucratic structures. Sisters initiated different forms of self-studies to evaluate present conditions and formulate future renewal direction. In the later years of the transformation, sisters used sociological principles to justify innovations, particularly democratic or collegial forms of governance, to which Bishops and Roman authorities objected.

The result of this infusion of the social sciences into the transformation process was twofold: antiauthoritarian theories contributed to sister transition from hierarchical to more egalitarian authority structures; and they placed sisters in direct conflict with members of their congregations and significant portions of the Vatican hierarchy who objected to the application of sociological and psychological perspectives contrary to traditional patterns of

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Cardinal Cushing, "Opening Address: The Superior and Her Subjects," in Joseph E. Haley, C.S.C., ed. Proceedings of the 1959 Sisters' Institute of Spirituality: The Superior and the Personality Development of the Subject-Religious (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 1.

religious obedience. Though sociological ideas influenced changes in many facets of the lives of women religious, including the more mundane ones of dress and daily horariums, they affected authority patterns most profoundly.

This study explores sisters' incorporation of the social and behavioral sciences into their renewal of religious life. The story itself begins around 1950 and continues through to the present. This particular study concentrates on the years 1950-80, though it extends past those boundaries, toward the present, in limited places. Following the introduction, the second chapter provides a chronological framework for the discussion, in chapters three and four, of specific facets of the relationship of the social sciences to the renewal of women's institutes. Chapter two describes the transformation of American women religious in detail, first through a fictitious example, and then through a comprehensive overview of the chronology, developments, organizations and individuals which shaped the transition of women religious. The third chapter examines sisters' use of sociological theories in specific renewal activities. Sociological influence was evident in both stages of transformation examined in chapter three: from 1950 through 1965 sisters pursued renewal by developing individual expertise and corporate change through hierarchical institutions, following 1965 sisters enacted renewal by undertaking congregational self-studies modeled on group processes from the social sciences. Chapter four explores the ideological conflict between reformist sisters and the Vatican over issues, raised by Vatican II, of the nature of authority in the church, and the appropriate role of secular social science. The chapter details sister assertions, based on sociology, that hierarchy was inconsistent with religious life. It also examines the Vatican response that defined hierarchy as an essential component of religious life. The chapter also explores the divergent ways in which the documents of Vatican II were used by both sides of the conflict in defense of their positions.

There were three developments in the social and behavioral sciences that influenced the transformation of American women religious: authority theory, small-group theory, and

the concept of the coercive "total institution." The third chapter examines each development in turn, including the studies that influenced theory and the publications in which the new theories were articulated. Following a brief discussion of how sisters applied the total institution model to their own institutes, the chapter explores the application of authority theory and small-group theory by two Pacific Northwest congregations of women religious to their respective province or community renewal process. To document the dynamic character of sisters' understanding of authority in the transition from hierarchical to congregational renewal, the chapter examines a vehicle of change that embodied the understanding of authority that was specific to each stage.<sup>5</sup> Providence Heights College of Sister Formation in Issaquah, Washington, represents the stage characterized by hierarchical, institutional change, from 1950 to 1965. Self-studies undertaken by the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, centered in Seattle, Washington, and the Benedictine Sisters, Queen of Angels community, Mount Angel, Oregon, illustrate the egalitarian, collegial stage of renewal, following 1966.

This general study of sociological influences on the transformation of American women religious includes local studies because, following Vatican II, transformation occurred on the community and congregational level. The self-studies provide the only documentation of the private process of community dialogue and negotiation that

---

<sup>5</sup> Neither selected vehicle fits neatly and absolutely within the 1950-65, and 1966-present periods for the two stages. Providence Heights College did not close until 1969, though its closing was precipitated by the changes that Vatican II introduced to religious life. Additionally, orders were beginning to include sisters in decisions affecting community life as early as 1958, though again, prior to Vatican II sisters did not make decisions within a collegial framework, but were merely asked their opinion by superiors who would make final decisions. This fluidity of periodization reflects the fact that the transformation of American women religious was a complex and continuous process over a thirty-year time span. This fact does not contradict the model of the two-stage transformation, but rather suggests that not only women religious but also other institutions and practices within the Church experienced transformation through changing ideas about the meaning and source of religious authority. The models of hierarchical and collegial authority implicit in the argument of this paper were normative within the respective stages (1950-65 and 1966-present) of the transformation of women religious.

characterized the transformation from the mid 1960s through the 1970s. Discussion of the self-studies in chapter three complements the less localized ideological changes that are the focus of chapter four. I selected the particular Benedictine and Sister of Providence communities for several reasons. Though their proximity played a role, I selected them largely because both communities had preserved and made available to me documents that other communities had not. The Sisters of Providence, in particular, have a congregational commitment to maintain a comprehensive archive, and to preserve documents from the general history of their order, and its unique role in the transformation process through Providence Heights College. In addition, the two communities provided a contrast of monastic to apostolic communities, as the comparison of their respective self-study instruments bears out.

A note on interview transcriptions. It is my intention that the voices of women religious have clarity and presence in this study of their renewal efforts. The women religious I interviewed shared a very important piece of their lives with me in our conversations. They related stories of pain and triumph, humiliation and empowerment. Though many of them seemed surprised that a student of American history considered the story of their transformation to be important, I believe their testimonies are a precious resource (especially as many sisters who lived through the transformation age and pass on) and an essential component of this work. As such, I have transcribed interview tapes verbatim, including ungrammatical sentences, and breaks where the sister's thought process changed mid-sentence. It is my intention that this method of quotation reflects the human voices in this largely institutional history. I have used italics to indicate changes in voice inflection, particularly in emphatic statements by a sister.

## CHAPTER II

### “AT FIRST WE OBEYED, THEN LATER WE EXPLAINED”

#### A Study in Contrasts

To understand the extent of the transformation, it will help to contrast sisters' lives before and after the transformation process. To illustrate, this paper will contrast “Jane Johnson,” an eighteen-year-old 1950 graduate of Our Lady of Angels Catholic High School, and “Sally Smith,” a 1980 graduate of the same high school. Both women decided to profess vows in an order of sisters.<sup>6</sup> In 1950 Jane's decision to join a vowed congregation had many long-term implications. She was expected to relinquish her individual self to her new identity as a sister. Jane left behind her family and, from the day she entered her congregation, was unable to visit with them or have more than minimal contact with them. When she arrived at the novitiate Jane renounced all possessions,

---

<sup>6</sup> “Jane Johnson” and “Sally Smith” are fictitious characters created to illustrate how the transformation process affected the experience of individual sisters. Their biographies as postulants are a composite summary of actual experiences of sisters who professed prior to the transformation and their explanations of community life following the transformation, selected from transcriptions of tape recordings and written notes of interviews conducted by the author with Sr. Cecilia Abhold, SP, 7 April 1995, Seattle, Washington; Sr. Alberta Dieker, OSB, 7 March 1995, Mount Angel, Oregon; Sr. Janice Jackson, SNJM, 22 February, 16 March, 30 August, 1995 and 9 April 1996, Eugene, Oregon; Sr. Rosemarie Kasper, SNJM, 21 February 1995, Marylhurst, Oregon; Sr. Lillanna Kopp, SFCC, 16 March 1996, Portland, Oregon; Sr. Janet Ryan, SNJM, 7 February, 1995, Eugene, Oregon; and Sr. Margaret Traxler, SSND, 17 August 1995 Chicago, Illinois. The author's intention in providing the biographies is not to represent the whole of a postulant's experience, which frequently also included experiences of joy, growth, community, and healing, but rather to provide examples of how the transformation altered the individual sister's relationship to the church, her congregation, its leadership, and her own life path.

including the clothes on her back, and was issued a predetermined number of items which comprised the postulant habit.<sup>7</sup> Even the number of underclothes in her possession was decided for her. When Jane needed a new toothbrush, she had to request one from a superior. She neither possessed, nor had much use for money. Jane was trained and educated for religious life as part of a large group of postulants, with whom she shared most of her time. Though she was expected to be good-natured and friendly towards her peers, Jane was cautioned against forming "particular friendships" with any of the women. Jane was assigned to a dormitory room with functional, if minimal, furniture. Her daily life was completely regimented, including specific times allotted for grooming and recreation. Typically she was awakened at 5:30 A.M. for 5:45 prayers, 7:00 breakfast, 7:30 chores, and so on throughout the day until 9:00 P.M. lights out. Jane left the convent building only at limited, predetermined times, usually in the company of other sisters.

Her religious education included Catechism and the Rules of religious life. Jane was given formal academic education at a local Catholic college on the "twenty-year plan," in which she attended only summer classes until completion of her degree. Except in summer classes, Jane had minimal contact with lay persons or lay life. Jane was not allowed to eat lunch with her lay peers between classes in the college cafeteria; rather she ate in private quarters in the company of other sisters. Her "separateness" as a sister was ensured by regulations which governed all facets of her contact with the world outside her order. She did not have access to lay literature, television, or transportation. She did not drive an automobile, though she may have been permitted to ride a bicycle if her order were progressive on such issues.

---

<sup>7</sup> A postulant is a woman who is in her first stage of training for membership in an order of religious. Typically a woman passes through three stages before taking her final vows: postulancy, novitiate, and juniorate. The length of each stage varies from community to community, however, the entire progression usually spans three to five years.

Jane's education, vocation, and life within the community were governed by her superior, whom Jane respectfully addressed as "Mother." Jane's classes were chosen for her, as was her course of study, according to the needs of the order. The Mother Superior also selected Jane's vocational ministry for her, and Jane began work early in her novitiate. As her order was primarily a teaching order, Jane was assigned to teach mathematics in a local parish grade school, even though she had no formal training as a teacher and had studied mainly literature in high school. Jane was expected to comply cheerfully with all of the Mother's decisions, in keeping with her vow of obedience to Church authority. At the end of her training Jane took her final vows and was given a full habit unique to the order, typically floor length with starched headdress and veil. She was also given a new name, a "name in religion," to replace her given name. The transformation of Jane Johnson into Sister Mary Elizabeth was complete.

As a 1980 high school graduate, Sally Smith decided to join an order of teaching sisters, but her choice had vastly different implications for her life than Jane's choice had had in the 1950s. Her order did not expect Sally to relinquish her individual identity and assume a new sister identity. Rather, Sally's congregation nurtured her unique identity as a woman whose personality had already matured. Her identity as a sister was a natural extension of her personal identity. Sally had frequent contact with her family of origin. Sally committed herself to a simple life in which neither the possession, nor the lack of material objects would interfere with her spiritual vocation or her solidarity with the poor. Sally's order did not issue her a special habit unless she requested one. If in unusual circumstance she did wish to wear a distinctive garb, Sally's order would have issued her a modified version of the former habit, typically with knee-length skirt and simple head covering. More commonly, Sally dressed simply and modestly, obtaining needed clothing from second-hand stores and the like. Sally supplied her own toothbrush. Sally's sisterhood trained her for religious life primarily as an individual student, though her

religious education also included orientation to the common life of her religious community. Sally determined with whom and to what levels of intimacy she cultivated personal friendships. Sally could choose to live in one of a variety of different settings: a community facility, house or apartment, with many, few, or no other sisters. Sally determined her own daily schedule and use of time.

Sally's education and formation as a sister was radically different in 1980 than Jane's in 1950. Her religious education included generous doses of theology and philosophy. She pursued her academic education at a secular university as a full-time student. She had the choice to pursue an advanced degree. Sally had unlimited contact with lay persons. She chose her own reading material, recreation, and transportation. Sally might drive an automobile, though she might prefer to ride a bicycle, if she were progressive on such issues. Any "separateness" between Sally and her lay peers would result from Sally's interpretation of her role as a sister and her choices, rather than of imposed regulations. She determined her own course of study, as well as her later vocation, through a process of self-discernment and prayer, in conversation with her order. Sally's congregation determined the shape of community life for itself, rather than in conformity to the direction of a superior. Leadership positions existed in Sally's order, but she addressed those in such positions as "sister." Sally's vow of obedience to authority meant that she would be obedient to the call of God in her life, using her community as a resource to discern that call. When Sally took her final vows, she kept her clothing, her name, and her identity as a person who was also a sister.

### Transformation Overview

These profound changes in the lives of individual sisters resulted from the corporate transformation of Catholic women religious in the United States in the latter half of the

twentieth century. This transformation occurred in two stages. From 1950 through the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), sisters experienced change through hierarchical institutions which religious authorities had created in response to directives from the Vatican. In this period, change was initiated at the very top of the Catholic hierarchy, and filtered down through the authority structures of institutions, orders, and dioceses to the individual sister. Following Vatican II, however, the flow of initiative and authority reversed, and sisters themselves determined the direction, scope, and specific manifestation of "modernization" through congregational and community small group processes that ranged from simple democratic voting to complex dialogic consensus. Through these new processes sisters radically altered the institutional structures that they had inherited: they democratized their congregational structures of governance and personalized the interpretation of religious obedience. Vatican officials and local bishops resisted these and attempted to reassert hierarchical authority, as did members of women's congregations who preferred the former ideals of obedience to hierarchical authority.

The transition began 26 November to 8 December 1950, when men and women major superiors of vowed religious communities from throughout the world convened in Rome for the General Assembly of Religious. Both the meeting of the Assembly and its message were unprecedented in Catholic history. It was the first mass-gathering of religious leadership, from orders whose previous relationships with Rome had been largely independent of each other. The unprecedented congregation of leadership took on additional significance when, in a speech delivered December 8, Pope Pius XII called upon the sisters, priests, and brothers present to adapt their respective communities of religious to the circumstances of the modern world. In the Pontiff's Apostolic Constitution from the Assembly, *Sponsa Christi*, Pius specifically addressed the sisters: "We find some other things in the institutes of nuns which are neither necessary nor complementary; they are merely extrinsic and historical. And so we have decreed . . . to introduce cautiously and

prudently those adaptations to present-day conditions which will be able to bring not only greater dignity but also greater efficacy to this institute.”<sup>8</sup> Pius’ intention in calling for the modernization of religious life was rooted in his preoccupation with the troubles of modern society and his conviction that if sisters could become more integrated into modern life, they would be a powerful force for the healing for the world.<sup>9</sup>

The following autumn, Pius XII convened in Rome the first International Congress of Teaching Sisters. On September 15, 1951, the Holy Father addressed the congregated superiors of teaching orders from throughout the world and, elaborating on his address of the previous year, offered specific directions for the modernization of orders of women religious. Pius gave two mandates to the sisters present: to improve the education of teaching sisters to be equal to that of their lay colleagues in the schools, and to adapt outdated rules within the orders to the circumstances of modern society. The Pontiff prefaced his educational suggestions acceding “Many of your schools are being described and praised to Us as being very good. But not all. It is our fervent wish that all endeavor to become excellent.” “This presupposes” Pius continued, “that your teaching Sisters are masters of the subjects they expound. See to it, therefore, that they are well trained and that their education corresponds in quality and in academic degrees to that demanded by the State.”<sup>10</sup> Pius encouraged limited adaptation of outdated rules, suggesting: “It is possible that some details of the school schedules, certain regulations-- simple applications of the Rule,--certain customs which were, perhaps, in harmony with the past conditions but

---

<sup>8</sup> Pius XII, *Sponsa Christi*, quoted in Elizabeth Kolmer, Religious Women in the United States: A Survey of Influential Literature from 1950 to 1983 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Lora Ann Quinonez and Mary Daniel Turner, The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Pius XII, “Counsel to Teaching Sisters” (sections 17-18), 15 September 1951 (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference Publications Office, 1951), 7.

which today merely hinder educational work, must be adapted to new circumstances.”

Pius cautioned that sisters must form and implement these adaptations through traditional channels of church authority: “Let superiors and the general Chapters proceed in this matter conscientiously,” he urged, “with foresight, prudence, and courage and, where the case demands, let them not fail to submit the proposed changes to the competent ecclesiastical authorities.”<sup>11</sup> Though the Pope directed his remarks specifically to sisters in the teaching vocation, the changes he called for applied to all sisters.

In the Congregations of 1950 and 1951 Pius called for changes in the educational process and rules governing the community life of women religious. He urged sisters to make the necessary changes through a process of intercommunity dialogue and collaboration among superiors and provincials. In response to the papal mandates, women religious in the United States created cooperative institutions to facilitate the ordered modernization of sisters: the Institute of Spirituality for Sister Superiors (also called the Sisters’ Institute of Spirituality or SIS), the Sister Formation Conference (SFC), and the National Congress of Religious which would later become the Conference of the Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSW). Though the SIS, SFC, and the CMSW were reform-oriented institutions, they initially posed no challenge to, and in fact reinforced, traditional ideas of power and authority in the Catholic Church. Despite the Pope’s intentions, however, both institutions would later undergo profound transformation as the momentum of change focused sisters’ reform initiatives back onto the institutional hierarchy itself.

In 1952 American superiors of women’s religious congregations met at Notre Dame, Indiana, to discuss methods to comply with the Holy See’s order for improved sister education. In their deliberations they formulated the innovative concept of sister

---

<sup>11</sup> Pius XII, “Counsel to Teaching Sisters” (sec. 14), 6.

“formation.” Sister formation comprised both a chronological and a philosophical revision of sister education. It would combine the previously separate religious and academic education of postulants into a unified training program. Rather than attend college over many summers, sisters would receive full-time college education during their training for religious life. Exceeding Pius’ suggestions for reform, formation replaced the traditional system of postulant and novitiate education, which subjected the individual to the strict specifications of the religious Rule, with a system that would respond to the needs and capacities of the individual woman.

Beginning in 1953 the Institute of Spirituality for Sister Superiors sponsored annual meetings of superiors and formation directors at the University of Notre Dame to address religious superiors’ responsibilities for spiritual guidance of the women in their congregations.<sup>12</sup> The following year in Chicago sister educators founded the Sister Formation Conference to provide resources for superiors to implement formation principles in the communities under their governance.<sup>13</sup> As SFC publications explained, the Conference would “seek the advancement of the religious, cultural, and professional formation of sisters, on preservice and inservice levels.”<sup>14</sup> The words “preservice and inservice” were particularly significant. They indicated a shift towards the education of sisters *before* their communities placed them in vocational positions, in sharp contrast with the common practice of the time. Beginning in 1954 the Sister Formation Conference published a monthly Bulletin to advise superiors on issues related to formation, and sponsored yearly conferences with published proceedings in each of its six regional

---

<sup>12</sup> Neal. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Jo Weaver, New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Religious Authority (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 82.

<sup>14</sup> This statement of purpose appeared in the publication information of each edition of the Sister Formation Bulletin. Sister Formation Conference, Bulletin 1954-1962 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963).

divisions. The Sister Formation Conference provided the institutional framework for experimentation with and implementation of innovations in the education of sisters. The SFC was soon creating a curriculum and founding colleges specifically and exclusively for sisters in formation.

In 1955 the Sister Formation Conference, under the sponsorship of the National Catholic Education Association, secured a grant from the Ford Foundation to develop a college curriculum specifically for sisters. Through the summer of 1956 fifteen sisters met in Everett, Washington, to interpret the results of a year-long study of educational practices in religious communities of women, and to formulate a liberal arts sister curriculum to address the educational deficiencies it had identified.<sup>15</sup> The women of the Everett Curriculum Workshop were themselves highly educated and seasoned educators: each possessed a doctorate and extensive teaching experience in her field. Each sister contributed her expertise in a particular field of study to the development of the curriculum, and thus the sisters designed a curriculum for a bachelor's degree in "social science." The SFC then implemented the resulting Everett Curriculum in two "demonstration centers" created specifically for this purpose: the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, Minnesota, and Providence Heights College of Sister Formation in Issaquah, Washington.

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1956, Pope Pius had strengthened his request for cooperation among American sisters by calling for superiors of women's communities to form a permanent national conference. In response, on November 24, approximately 235 superiors of women's orders met in Chicago to discuss the merits and costs of banding into a conference. Except for the recent activities of the SFC, interorder cooperation and dialogue was unfamiliar to many of the superiors present. Each of them was used to viewing her own community of origin as a unique autonomous entity, with

---

<sup>15</sup> Marjorie Noterman Beane, From Framework to Freedom: A History of the Sister Formation Conference (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 45.

correspondingly unique and private problems, and regarding other orders with suspicion. Consequently, superiors initially hesitated to confirm the founding of the conference by vote. A statement from the floor stating, "Rome wishes it, and . . . as obedient children of the Church there should be no hesitancy in forming it" quelled the superiors' ambivalence.<sup>16</sup> A unanimous vote followed, and so the Conference of the Major Superiors of Women was born. The CMSW quickly evolved from its ambivalent genesis into a vibrant forum to discuss common problems and the challenging mandates from the Vatican. It eventually became a powerful advocate for sisters. Through the representative superiors, the CMSW, for the first time, linked separate communities of women religious into a single network. Though the founding statutes define the purpose of the conference as "the promotion of the spiritual welfare" of American sisters, the CMSW almost immediately began to extend those boundaries.<sup>17</sup>

The SFC and the CMSW precipitated change among American women religious on two levels. By facilitating compliance with the directives of the Holy See, both conferences developed innovations that altered previous educational and community norms: the SFC altered the schedule and focus of the education of the sister in formation, and the CMSW used national studies to identify and address problems common to all orders of women religious. Though these changes were entirely within, and in fact supported by, the authority structure of the Church, the SFC and CMSW also changed the way that women religious viewed themselves. In doing so they laid a foundation of sister empowerment upon which sisters would later construct critiques of hierarchical power. As sisters in the CMSW found a common voice, they also began to use that voice, at first tentatively but increasingly boisterously, to express dissatisfaction with the status quo. By

---

<sup>16</sup> Quinonez and Turner, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 68.

directly stating their needs, sisters did something unthinkable by conventions of the time. Expanding the concept of formation to include and respond to intellectual, spiritual, and professional needs of young sisters, the SFC recognized the uniqueness of each sister. The sisters who were formed under these auspices had a stronger and clearer sense of personal identity than their sisters educated under the previous system. In both conferences, vibrant and outspoken leaders began to emerge. These changes can be illustrated by the gradual shift from male to female speakers at SFC conference meetings: in the 1954 regional conferences, reverend and brother speakers outnumbered sisters fifty-nine to two; by 1957 this ratio had narrowed to nine male to seven female speakers. In the 1960s male participation in the conferences further diminished to such functions such as providing the opening invocation, otherwise sisters provided conference addresses.

Sister organizations altered the world of American women religious on yet another level by introducing the concept of expertise into religious life. Conferences addressed superiors and formation directors as professionals and sought to sharpen their expertise by providing them with information and skills specific to their leadership positions. Additionally, the SIS, SFC, and CMSW applied management and psychological expertise to religious and set a precedent for sisters to use sociology and psychology as tools to evaluate and shape religious life. The 1959 Sisters' Institute of Spirituality, "The Superior and the Personality Development of the Subject-Religious," focused on a superior's responsibility for the psychological health of sisters under her authority. In the opening address Cardinal Cushing affirmed that "those who exercise authority in religious communities should know something of the fundamental psychology of human relationships and develop certain of the skills of leadership and government which modern psychology has made available."<sup>18</sup> The conference included an address by a psychiatrist

---

<sup>18</sup> Joseph E. Haley, C.S.C., ed, 1.

on "Personality Disorders and Procedures," and a speech which described "The Local Superior as Counselor." In a two-part address the 1959 SIS also explored both the "Religious and Psychological Justification" as well as the "Validity and Implication of psychological testing procedures for religious life."<sup>19</sup> The addresses suggested an essential compatibility of secular scientific expertise with sister efforts for renewal. They also rendered appropriate a quantitative analysis of religious life by scientific researchers, *if* conducted in the service of improved religious life or efficacy of sister apostolic work.

Accordingly, sisters began to conduct comprehensive studies and use the data they collected to inform their renewal decisions. The study which preceded the Everett Curriculum Workshop is one example of this trend. The published proceedings of the 1956-57 SFC contained seventy-four statistical tables analyzing various facets of sisters' teaching apostolate, from "Summary Statistics for Special Education Programs Directed by Sisters, 1950-56" to "Summary of Time Situation for All Groups of Sisters."<sup>20</sup> In the early 1960s the CMSW commissioned sister-sociologist Marie Augusta Neal to conduct a sociological study of all women's congregations in the United States.<sup>21</sup> These initial studies revealed some common challenges which sisters faced, such as educational disadvantages, health deficiencies, inadequate salaries, and declining numbers of recruits. They also introduced the expertise of a quantitative analysis of religious life into the renewal process, and exposed the formerly private sphere of religious to researchers from the social and behavioral sciences. In addition, these early studies established a precedent

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., xi-xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Sister Ritamary, CHM, ed. Planning for the Formation of Sisters: Studies on Teaching Apostolate and Selections from Addresses of the sister Formation Conferences 1956-1957 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1958), ix-xii.

<sup>21</sup> The results of the 1966 survey, as well as those of a comparative 1982 study also conducted by Neal for the CMSW, were published as Marie Augusta Neal, SND de Namur Catholic Sisters in Transition: From the 1960s to the 1980s (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984).

for the later centrality of similar studies and surveys to the congregational and community level of the transformation.

On January 25, 1959, after only ninety days as Pope, John XXIII announced that he would convoke the Church's Twenty-First Ecumenical Council. From October 11, 1962, through December 7, 1965, representatives from throughout the Catholic world convened in Rome for the Second Vatican Council.<sup>22</sup> The concepts and documents that resulted from Vatican II sent shock waves through the Catholic Church. The Fathers of the Council<sup>23</sup> called for renewal of the Church and liberalization of its relationship to human society. Several theological innovations resulted from Vatican II, foremost among them the doctrine that the spirit of the Church resided in its members, "the People of God"<sup>24</sup> collectively, rather than in its institutions and authority structures. The documents of Vatican II reflected the Council's concern that, the church should not inhabit a sphere separate from the world, but rather should engage the world and remain relevant to the dynamic character of human history.

Vatican II also addressed the issue of renewal in orders of vowed religious and instructed them to adapt their institutes to the contingencies of the modern world. Extending to communities of religious the theology of the spiritual sovereignty of the people, the Council directed leaders of communities to include all members of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Kolmer, 37.

<sup>23</sup> The term "Fathers of the Council" was significant. No women were among the participants in the Council. Fifteen women, predominantly American sisters, were present as observers, carrying the same status of silence as Protestant observers. Mary Luke Tobin, a sister-observer who would become a central figure in LCWR battles against Church authority, summed up women's experience of the Vatican Council with the phrase, "None of us spoke." Mary Luke Tobin, Hope is an Open Door (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) in The Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter Abbott, SJ (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 24.

community in discussions of renewal.<sup>25</sup> The Council document that exclusively addressed the subject stated that leaders and superiors must “consult the members and give them a hearing.”<sup>26</sup> The same document also established two sources of guidance for orders through this process: the Gospels and the spirit of the founder (foundress) of the order.<sup>27</sup> In 1966, immediately following the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI in Motu Proprio on Perfectae Caritatis approved a period of experimentation for orders to develop and implement innovations within their rules and norms. Paul VI called on congregations to experiment, over a considerable number of years, with their life style, government, and apostolic effectiveness. As a final goal of these experiments, congregations were to rewrite their constitutions and submit them to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRSI) in Rome for approval.

Temporarily freed of the weight of traditional patterns of deference to a hierarchy to which they were outsiders, women religious began to feel, understand, and exercise their own power within their congregations. Sisters used the relative freedom to enact profound transformations in the religious world they had inherited: most abandoned hierarchical authority within their private world, and replaced it with models that reflected their increasingly egalitarian understanding of power and its exercise. Sisters took Vatican suggestions of community “consultation” one step further and, borrowing from sociological small-group models, began to experiment with egalitarian models of decision

---

<sup>25</sup> Kolmer, 39. For further reading on the Second Vatican Council and its effect on American Catholicism, see Guiseppe Albergio, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., The Reception of Vatican II (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1987), and John Tracy Ellis, American Catholicism 2d ed., rev. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 163-254.

<sup>26</sup> Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, *Perfectae Caritatis* (Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life), in Documents of Vatican II, 470.

<sup>27</sup> Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 468.

making, such as self-studies, sociometric surveys, "team" grouping, and consensus-orientation. The new decision processes produced profound changes in congregation rules and community life: sisters modified and later abolished the habit; they redefined their interpretation of the vows; they opened previously closed channels of information, and liberalized restrictions on living arrangements and interaction with laity; and they established a norm of educational and vocational self-definition for themselves.<sup>28</sup> Most sisters also rejected hierarchical forms of organization, replacing the familial "mother" and subservient children model of institutional order with collegial leadership and community dialogue.

American women religious interpreted the documents of Vatican II and the Pope's prescription for experimentation within the context of the diversity which already existed among women's congregations in the United States. *Perfectae Caritatis* had called for the renewal of individual religious institutes according to their interpretations of their unique histories as congregations. Thus, after the Council, the central renewal of American sisters shifted from national organizations to local congregations and communities. And within the Motu Proprio period of experimentation and relative freedom from traditional patterns, different congregations of women religious responded with markedly diverse renewal structures. While some communities walked a cautious path towards renewal, others initiated drastic departures from traditional patterns, even renouncing submission to Vatican authority. And while most congregations made community-wide participation a priority in the renewal process, the forms of this participation varied widely from congregation to congregation. Some congregations adopted strictly democratic models of majority-rule voting on renewal decisions. Other congregations experimented with dialogic models, making community consensus a prerequisite for adoption of any change. Most

---

<sup>28</sup> Ryan interview.

congregations, however, held chapter meetings in which individual sisters were encouraged to express previously internalized opinions and preferences.<sup>29</sup>

American women religious also interpreted Vatican II mandates for reform within the context of their previous and continuing work renewing their orders. Motu Proprio only accelerated the momentum of change that was already at work among American women religious before Vatican II. That momentum also brought about the explosive creativity manifest among American women religious in their experiments. In crafting their Motu Proprio experiments, sisters wielded two contextually-derived tools, in addition to the two sources specifically mentioned by the Council: the empowerment they had experienced in the previous collaborative endeavors of the SFC and the CMSW, and their relatively comfortable relationship with the “expertise” that the social and behavioral sciences had contributed to prior reform efforts. The SFC and CMSW had given women religious in leadership positions practical experience in cooperation and in redefining facets of religious life for themselves, apart from the models that they had inherited. These sisters entered the experimentation period practiced in collegial relationships, and with firmly established intracommunity lines of communication.

One clear expression of sustained sister solidarity on renewal issues was the Trans-Sister (sisters in transition) newsletter, published from 1967 through 1971 by a coalition of sisters from several orders (“the blue with the black with the brown”)<sup>30</sup> to share information about renewal efforts across institutes. It originated from sisters’ work in the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ). In 1966 Sr. Margaret Traxler, SSND, then educational director of the conference, selected a staff of women

---

<sup>29</sup> Abhold interview.

<sup>30</sup> Kopp interview. This was Lillanna Kopp’s way of describing the conglomeration of Trans-Sister sisters, who were still wearing the distinctive habits of their orders at the time they founded the publication.

religious from different communities to travel through the United States to offer training on race relations. The NCCIJ-sponsored, sister-led workshops on racial awareness, themselves, suggest the extent to which sisters had already comfortably integrated sociological concepts such as "sensitivity training" into their charisms. The NCCIJ described these sisters as the "will-power, brain-power and horsepower for extensive work for human rights."<sup>31</sup> In five years they held workshops in 112 cities in the United States.<sup>32</sup> On the road, packed into station wagons, the sisters of the NCCIJ workshops had occasion to observe renewal efforts in the many regions and communities they visited. They also talked among themselves about the challenges of renewal. In Chicago one evening in 1966, they decided to produce a newsletter to share transition information ("what works and what doesn't") among congregations.<sup>33</sup> In the first issue of the Trans-Sister, Sr. Maryellen Muckenhirn, CSC, commented on the growing diversity within religious life:

I would suggest that one such growing point for renewal today is the joyous acceptance of multiple forms of life style within any one previously one-style community. This topic urgently demands study, research and experimentation. Every sister in this country knows by now that there are greatly differing viewpoints on anything discussed in her community. But every sister has also experienced religious life as conformity to one externally established pattern which she freely accepted before Vatican II.<sup>34</sup>

Her words on "study, research and experimentation" expressed these sisters' perception that renewal included analytic appraisal of newly-emergent forms of religious life.

---

<sup>31</sup> Sister Mary Peter (Margaret Traxler), SSND, ed., Nuns' Newsletter (published by the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice), March 1967, page 1. Copy in possession of the author. Additional copy in the National Coalition of American Nuns papers (Thereinafter, NCAN), Marquette University Archives.

<sup>32</sup> NCAN papers, Marquette University Archives, Series 3, Box 1.

<sup>33</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>34</sup> Sr. Maryellen Muckenhirn, CSC, in Trans-Sister, November, 1967, page 6.

The social and behavioral sciences, particularly sociology, figured in multiple facets of the transformation of sisters after Vatican II. As before the Council, sisters used the results of sister surveys to shape renewal directions after 1966. Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, sociologist and author of the 1966 survey sponsored by the CMSW, writes of the survey's utility that:

Even by October 1966, when the special *Normae* was published, urging congregations to renewal, 437 institutes of women already had a considerable data base from the first report that compared their own congregations with the national profile of other congregations. This allowed them to determine the actual conditions of their group in light of the Council mandates.<sup>35</sup>

After the Second Vatican Council, local, congregational surveys and other sociological instruments also became central instruments of renewal processes. In addition to using quantitative instruments, many congregations hired secular management experts to guide congregations through self-evaluation.<sup>36</sup> In 1969 the CMSW itself hired Park Avenue, New York, management consultants Booz, Allen and Hamilton, Inc. to conduct a study of the Conference.<sup>37</sup>

Sociology entered the transformation more directly in the person of Sr. (Audrey) Lillanna Kopp (then SNJM, currently SFCC). Kopp received her doctorate in sociology from St. Louis University in 1960. Though she primarily taught at Marylhurst College through the 1960s, she continued to research, write, and apply sociological principles to the transition. Fr. Andrew Greely and Sr. Marie Augusta Neal invited her to present her research on women religious to the American Catholic Sociological Conference in Miami, Florida in August of 1966. Sr. Neal, who was conducting research for the CMSW at the

---

<sup>35</sup> Neal, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>37</sup> Sr. Margaret Mary Modde, OSF. A Canonical Study of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) of the United States of America Doctor of Canon Law Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1977. 152.

time, invited superiors from the CMSW to attend Kopp's address on women religious. Over dinner the evening after her address the superiors further questioned Kopp about her presentation, and several superiors invited her to make a similar presentation to the sister councils or congregational meetings of their institutes. From this beginning Sr. Kopp began what she describes as a "massive educational effort for women religious" that kept her traveling and speaking to sisters for the next five years.<sup>38</sup> In 1968 Sr. Francis Borgia Rothluebber, OSF, of Milwaukee published Kopp's presentation in book form, entitled The New Nuns: Collegial Christians, a Sociological Analysis. In the following years thousands of copies were printed and distributed among American sisters. Kopp now postulates that superiors reacted so strongly to her presentation because they were searching for guidance in their renewal efforts: "This is why I got constant invitations, is, the leaders, the major superiors, knew they were the leaders but they didn't know where to lead. So this was a big relief to them to have someone who felt very sure of her information and documented it-- even in a simple little book."<sup>39</sup> Kopp translated complex sociological principles into language that sisters could understand, and created the sociological framework within which sisters would evaluate their experience of religious life.

Lillanna Kopp later remembered her educational presentations to sisters as, "an absolutely wonderful opportunity to, an educational opportunity to relieve this intense need I had to share with sisters what I knew from sociology would be a profound concept."<sup>40</sup> Drawing on graphic charts to illustrate her presentation, Kopp rendered her profound concept quite simply: triangle and circle. She began by discussing sociological theory on

---

<sup>38</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>39</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>40</sup> Kopp interview.

the destructive nature of authoritarian power, in contrast to the affirming character of shared power in a collegial setting. She characterized the pre-Vatican II church as an authoritarian triangle, representing a heretical, hierarchical, and bureaucratic "split-level convent" in which superiors ruled over inferiors.

The members of the administrative elite at the apex of the power pyramid deliberate, discuss, decide issues among themselves, and finally, in the name of AUTHORITY dictate decisions to subordinates who are expected, in the name of obedience, to rather passively listen, and virtuously submit their thoughts, views and judgments to the thoughts, views and judgments of the superiors, convinced that in so submitting they were obeying the voice of God.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast she posited the ideal model of the "one-level professional ecclesial community," symbolized by a circle, in which "all persons in a community of adults have both the right and the responsibility to dialogue towards consensus, and make corporate decisions for the common good according to the talents or charisma of each, and the needs of all."<sup>42</sup> Sisters were to enact the transition from pyramid to circle through a "reform of current authority patterns."<sup>43</sup> Kopp argued that insights from the religious world and from the social sciences were harmonious and mutually-supportive in their contributions to sisters' transition from triangle to circle.

Happily, through Vatican II openness, through the publication of research finds in psychology, sociology, theology and Sacred Scripture, we have become critically aware that our structure of authority is a secular form mal-adaptive for human development, is the very form, in fact, which Christ warned against in the NEW TESTAMENT. Because of the dysfunctional nature of AUTHORITARIANISM, because it creates a pyramidal structure opposed to COLLEGIAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, we know that we must destroy it before it destroys us.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Sister Mary Audrey Kopp, SNJM, The New Nuns: Collegial Christians, a Sociological Analysis (Chicago: Argus Communications, 1968), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 51. This passage appears entirely in caps in the original text.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 5.

Lillanna Kopp's writing were influential in the transformations process, and her ideas about authority would later appear in congregational revisions of their constitutions.

The social and behavioral sciences left a distinct imprint on the renewal of American women religious in the period following Vatican II. This scientific expertise impressed a strong antiauthoritarian disposition in the experimental governance structures of many women's institutes. The surveys, self-studies, quantitative instruments, and methods of group process that individual congregations used to formulate new directions for themselves were derived from the social sciences, and carried within them implicit values of therapy, self-expression, and self-determination that were thus infused into the renewal process. When institutes later encountered opposition to their structural reforms, they would defend their experiments with arguments of rationality and expertise.

Newly emboldened by the spirit of Vatican II and armed with sociological models of egalitarian communities, many congregations of women religious embraced what they understood to be the new direction of the Church by quickening their previously hesitant steps toward *aggiornamento* into a brisk, confident gait. Many sisters reevaluated their relationship to the Church, and found that their self-perceptions conflicted with the expectations of some American bishops and the Vatican.<sup>45</sup> The Vatican had neither intended nor foreseen that such dramatic changes would result from the papal mandates. A marked disparity loomed between the pre-Vatican II Papal intent to modernize orders without disrupting the essential authority structures within the Church, and the sisters' critique of hierarchical power that followed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Unfortunately, women religious soon discovered, the hierarchy of the Church still claimed them, even if they no longer claimed it.

As most congregations realized that their new norms of governance were no longer

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

consistent with the values of the Church authority structure, the Vatican also realized that American women religious were forging unexpected and revolutionary paths. In 1970 the Conference of Major Superiors, once itself a manifestation of institutional hierarchy, formally and publicly recognized the changing nature of power in women's institutes by renaming itself the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Rome did not welcome this change, and withheld formal approval of the name change for three years. Nevertheless, the LCWR began to use its new name in 1971.<sup>46</sup> Local bishops and cardinals became increasingly critical of the liberalized rules sisters were implementing in their communities. Sr. Cecilia Abhold, SP, who served as Provincial of the Sisters of Providence in the Pacific Northwest Sacred Heart Province through the transition period, later recalled her interactions with bishops in the late 1960s:

Oh, they didn't like it. We had a lot of opposition to the things that we decided to do. We had a difference of opinion, and I personally had some very interesting discussions because when one is the provincial, one always meets with all of the bishops wherever we are serving. So, you know, there was some shaking of the boots and that type of thing. But we saw *a vision*, if you will, and in order to carry out that vision, these were the decisions that were made. And part of the problem was: "Why do you think you can make those decisions? That isn't the way I would want you to do it," the bishop would say. And we would explain why: "There is *no future* unless we accomplish some of these things. They are very necessary."<sup>47</sup>

In June of 1971, in an effort to clarify Vatican position on contentious renewal issues, and the parameters and limits of reform, Pope Paul VI released Evangelica Testificatio, his Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life.

Confrontations between women's institutes and Roman authority continued to escalate during the late 1960s and through the 1970s. One sister described her order's

---

<sup>46</sup> Weaver, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Abhold interview. Italics added by author to reflect voice inflection. Sr. Abhold's career closely mirrored the transformation process. She was present at the Everett Curriculum Workshop to record the proceedings. In addition to being Provincial Superior of her order during a time of rapid transition, she was also a member of the CMSW, and a member of its board during and immediately following Vatican II.

changing relationship to the Vatican through the transition in the following terms: "At first we obeyed. Then later we explained. And now we basically just don't give a shit."<sup>48</sup> Her statement reflects the extent to which the process of reform, conflict, and negotiation with the Vatican was to remain a constant feature of women's communities to the present.

Conflicts with Rome also caused tensions within communities between sisters who accepted confrontation with the Vatican and sisters who advocated traditional deference to Papal authority. Sr. Abhold recalled that "times of change are painful. Any change brought about difficulties, because some people are open to change immediately and see the need for it. Others find change difficult, even to this day. . . . So all of that [change], it had to be driven, in a way, through all of that differences of opinion."<sup>49</sup>

Conflicts with the Vatican and conflicts among American sisters produced several different coalitions of women religious, each of which advocated a different direction for sisters. In 1970 the LCWR, stepping into the fray, established a panel to mobilize the collective power of American sisters in support of orders which faced official sanctions from the Church.<sup>50</sup> In 1969 sisters Margaret Traxler and Lillanna Kopp founded the National Coalition of American Sisters (soon to be renamed the National Coalition of American Nuns or NCAN) to advocate in the media for sisters' autonomy from what they perceived as patriarchal coercion by the hierarchy of the church. In July, 1969, Trans-Sister published a statement from NCAN, which later received national publicity in the National Catholic Reporter (NCR) and Newsweek. The statement read:

As religious women in the Church, we protest any domination of our institutes by priests, no matter what their hierarchical status. We have founded a National Coalition of American Sisters defending themselves against those who would

---

<sup>48</sup> Sr. Jane Doe, tape recorded interview with author, 1995. The name "Jane Doe" is a pseudonym. Sr. Doe did not wish to have her name publically attached to the quote.

<sup>49</sup> Abhold interview.

<sup>50</sup> Weaver, 94

interfere with the internal administration and/or renewal we alone can and must evolve in our communities . . . . The National Coalition of American Sisters calls upon men of the Church to respect our right by refraining from all interference with the internal administrative and/or renewal processes in the congregations of women religious.<sup>51</sup>

In response, one sister wrote to Traxler, stating that NCAN “sounds like a possible solution to that which seems to be the most formidable obstacle to renewal, authority problems with Pastors, Bishops and Cardinals.”<sup>52</sup> The NCAN statement also moved feminist theologian Dr. Mary Daly to write to the NCR that:

The formation of the National Coalition of American sisters which is protesting the domination of sisters by priests and bishops (NCR Aug. 13) is a highly significant event in American church history . . . . The editors of Trans-Sister and leaders of the new movement among religious women are showing determination and courage. In some ways it would be easier for them to drop out, or do their own thing, and perhaps form non-canonical communities. Given their option to “stay in” and be yet autonomous, one can only wish them continued courage and hope. If there is hope for the institutional church it will come from such as these.<sup>53</sup>

NCAN continued to defend sister autonomy throughout the latter years of the transformation. It also, almost immediately after its inception, began to issue public statements on a wide array of social-justice concerns.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, in 1971 a group of sisters separated from the CMSW to oppose CMSW advocacy of liberalized congregations.<sup>54</sup> They named

---

<sup>51</sup> Sr. Margaret Ellen Traxler to the sisters on the planning committee for NAWR (National Assembly of Women Religious), memo, 24 September 1969, NCAN Papers, Marquette University Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Series 3, Box 1, “correspondence, 1969-1973.”

<sup>52</sup> Sister Julia Fernandez, CSC, to Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, typed letter, 16 August 1969, NCAN Papers, Series 3, Box 1, “correspondence, 1969-1973.”

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Mary Daly to Editors of the National Catholic Reporter, typed letter, 20 August, 1969, NCAN Papers, Series 3, Box 1, “correspondence, 1969-1973.”

<sup>54</sup> The organizations recognized their mutual adversary relationship. Writing to congratulate Sr. Mary Daniel Turner on her new position within the LCRW, Margaret Traxler quipped that: “I cannot say that NCAN will be on your ‘right side’ since The Consortium will probably serve that function. We will, however, try to be a faithful companion on your ‘left.’” Margaret Traxler to Mary Daniel Turner, SND, typed letter, 5 June 1972, NCAN Papers, Series 3, Box 1, “correspondence, 1969-1973.”

themselves the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis (CPC) after the Vatican II document on the renewal of religious life, and sought Roman recognition as the true representative organization of women's renewal.<sup>55</sup> The Consortium raised two objections to the then current patterns of renewal among American women religious: they argued that sisters had inappropriately rejected hierarchical and Papal authority; and they opposed secular influences, particularly that of the social sciences, on renewal direction. Consortium sisters retained the traditional religious habit and veil. In accord with traditional authority within the church, the Consortium leadership was comprised largely of clerical males. Moreover, in a return to norms reminiscent of the early years of the SIS, SFC, and the CMSW, the Consortium's national assemblies featured almost all-male rosters of speakers on topics such as "Female Spirituality." Marie Augusta Neal found that the Consortium denounced the sister survey she had conducted for the CMSW, "warning administrators not to take it seriously and claiming that it had a 'this-worldly' social bias."<sup>56</sup> In a 1973 letter the CPC defined itself in relation and subject to Vatican authority:

The Consortium is not a forum for contestation and debate, but it is a communications enterprise which sets forth the finest thoughts of contemporary scholars whose interdisciplinary studies serve to highlight the continuing magisterial pronouncements and the directives emanating from the Sacred Congregation for Religious in directing the renewal of religious life in our times.<sup>57</sup>

The CPC remained in an adversarial relationship with NCAN and the LCWR throughout the transformation process. In 1973 Sr. Ann Gillen, then Executive Director of NCAN, issued a public statement that called the Consortium a "scandal among American sisterhoods." Among her enumerated criticisms of the Consortium were that:

---

<sup>55</sup> Hennessey, 316.

<sup>56</sup> Neal, 57.

<sup>57</sup> Reverend James A. Viall to Vicars, typed letter, 7 August 1973, NCAN papers, Series 3, Box 1, "correspondence, 1969-1973."

it is a union of superiors which has denied full renewal freedom to members of their own congregations. Blind guides are leading the blinded; it considers veils so important that it would exclude sisters who do not wear them. What is more important, the consecrated person or the blessed cloth?; it has-- in the name of humility-- made arrogant claims to restrict 'religious life' to its image and likeness, implying that those groups which do not belong to the Consortium are disloyal to the Pope.<sup>58</sup>

In 1974 the LCWR and the CPC faced-off in print. In response to Paul VI's 1971 exhortation on religious renewal, the Leadership Conference, in cooperation with the Canadian Religious Conference, published a set of essays by sisters entitled Widening the Dialogue: Reflections on Evangelica Testificatio. Its purpose was to initiate "dialogue with each other and with others about the thoughts, the intuitions, the questions and the visions of Pope Paul."<sup>59</sup> The following year the Consortium published "Widening the Dialogue . . . ?", a critical response to the LCWR essays. In the document, Consortium writers systematically challenged the content of each essay in the LCWR publication. More importantly, the Consortium directly challenged the LCWR's right to initiate such a dialogue with or about a document authored by the Pontiff:

The very nature of a papal document because of the divinely given authority of its author, prescinding from even his competence in the area of the sacred sciences, supported and strengthened by explicit norms from an ecumenical council regarding the acceptance of such documents on the part of the faithful, would certainly preclude, it would seem, in those loyally adhering to the Church, any public written attempt to challenge to dialogue the Supreme Pontiff regarding any solemn document he has proclaimed to the world.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Ann Gillen, Press Release, 1973, NCAN Papers, Series 3, Box 1, "correspondence, 1969-1973."

<sup>59</sup> Sr. Margaret Brennan, President LCWR, "Introduction," Widening the Dialogue: Reflections on Evangelica Testificatio (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Religious, 1974), iii.

<sup>60</sup> Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, "Widening the Dialogue . . . ?": Response by the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis to Widening the Dialogue: Reflection on Evangelica Testificatio by Leadership Conference of Women Religious indicated by the S.C.R.S.I. to mean Conference of Leaders of Religious Women in the U.S. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975), 1.

The publications reflected the rift that was opening between the majority of women religious who were challenging church hierarchy, and the small but determined minority who wished to retain traditional patterns of authority. The writings also suggest that women religious were beginning to doubt the "good faith" of those on the other side of the controversy.

Caught between competing definitions of religious life within their communities and competing models of authority within the Church, many sisters chose to leave religious life entirely. From the 1960s through the 1980s, women's congregations experienced sharply declining memberships. One notorious example of this trend was the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters in Los Angeles (IHM). Ordered by Cardinal James J. MacIntyre in 1968 to retract some of their community reforms, 400 of the 450 sisters departed the order en masse to form the lay Immaculate Heart Community, while 50 older sisters remained within the canonical order.<sup>61</sup> As women religious became increasingly willing to relinquish canonical status to preserve their philosophical and spiritual integrity, noncanonical communities of women sprang up to accommodate them. Facing an ultimatum from her Provincial superior either to cease her writing and speaking on the renewal or to leave her order, in 1970 Lillanna Kopp left her Holy Names congregation in Marylhurst, Oregon, to found the Sisters for Christian Community (SFCC), the largest noncanonical community of women.<sup>62</sup> Her organization of "sisters, but not of the pyramid," absorbed smaller noncanonical communities under its umbrella, using "communications coordinators" to help facilitate collegial decision process for SFCC

---

<sup>61</sup> Kolmer, 106.

<sup>62</sup> Lillanna Kopp, Sudden Spring: 6th Stage Sisters (Waldport, Oregon: Sunspot Publications, 1983) is an excellent source for the theology, theory, and practice of noncanonical women's communities.

members.<sup>63</sup> Kopp sees SFCC as a fulfillment of the experimentation following Vatican II. “What we’re really doing is testing the model, and is it viable? That’s what the sisters in the 60s and 70s didn’t know and they still don’t know. If we took the risk to buck Rome and move to this model would it work?”<sup>64</sup> The steady growth of SFCC from its genesis through the present suggests that noncanonical status was and remains, for women religious, an attractive alternative to the tensions which characterize canonical relationships with the Vatican.

Conflicts between American women’s institutes and the institutional church continued through the 1970s and climaxed in the early 1980s over the issue of governance in the constitutional revisions of individual congregations. Motu Proprio had directed congregations of religious to revise their constitutions and submit them to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, the Vatican committee that oversees religious life, for approval. In the years that followed this mandate, American congregations of women religious had experimented with different forms of governance and decision-making, refining structures as they went. Rather than consult with canon lawyers about the legal content of constitutions, many communities had utilized forms of group process and participatory discussion in renewal chapter meetings.<sup>65</sup> The resulting constitutions that congregations submitted to the SCRSI represented years of dialogue, study, and reflection on the spirit and purpose of the institute. Many, as a matter of course, reinterpreted the meaning of religious authority and obedience, and officially replaced hierarchical decision process and with popular participation in governance.

In 1982 American congregations began to submit their revisions to SCRSI, only to

---

<sup>63</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>64</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>65</sup> Neal, 60.

find that the Sacred Congregation rejected many provisions of their new constitutions. Though the Sacred Congregation objected to many of the liberalized provisions of women's constitutions--changes to the habit or more flexible forms of community life-- its main point of contention was that sisters had adopted collegial forms of governance that the Congregation found to be at variance with hierarchical church structures. SCRSI stated its objections by rewriting sisters' constitutions and returning them to the congregations for adoption. Lillanna Kopp recalled that, "hundreds of groups changed their constitutions to collegial community, and other changes, too, and submitted them to Rome. When they, and then they were mailed back as though a teacher with a red pen had corrected them."<sup>66</sup> In order to remain canonical, religious institutes needed SCRSI approval of constitutional revisions. American women's congregations faced a dilemma.

Given a choice either to comply with SCRSI changes or lose canonical status, most congregations felt they had no choice but to comply. They took the constitutions that they had formulated through years of experimentation and collegial dialogue, and rewrote them according to the dictates of the hierarchy, to affirm hierarchy as the source of authority for their congregations. Kopp reflected:

This is what I learned at NCAN-- from the horses mouth as it were, from the different communities-- they corrected it [the constitutions] because they had to. . . This is what I have heard-- but it isn't published anywhere, but this is what you're gonna find-- that communities conformed to the red, to the letter. There was nothing else they could do if they wanted to remain canonical.<sup>67</sup>

Writing in 1990, Marie Augusta Neal asserted that this conflict was continuing as "approval even to experiment with these new models, already embodied in revised constitutions, is given or held back by a papal commission that has not yet recognized the viability of such

---

<sup>66</sup> Kopp interview.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

cooperative structures.”<sup>68</sup> Some congregations solved this dilemma with subterfuge: they adopted SCRSI changes in their written constitutions, as a cover, but continued, covertly, to practice collegial process in community decisions.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to affecting their relationship to the institutional Catholic church, the transformation also affected the way that sisters interacted with the lay world. Sisters’ educational advances in the social and behavioral sciences, and their liberalized relationship to laity after Vatican II, expanded the definition of vocations for sisters. Whereas before the transformation sisters had served primarily as teachers, nurses, and social workers, during and after the modernization process they also pursued works of mercy through avenues such as advocacy and activism. As sisters learned to criticize the deficiencies and injustices of the church power structures, they increasingly turned their critical skills to the secular society in which they lived. Having begun to redress the inequities within the Catholic church, sisters attempted to redress inequities in the society at large. Sisters became increasingly active in political radicalism during this time. Many participated in acts of protest and civil disobedience over issues of women’s equality, poverty, civil rights, labor rights, opposition to the Vietnam war, and nuclear disarmament.

---

<sup>68</sup> Neal, 90.

<sup>69</sup> Jackson interview, 30 August, 1995.

## CHAPTER III

### “SISTERS, BUT NOT OF THE PYRAMID”

#### The Sociological Context for Women’s Renewal

Developments within the academic spheres mirrored and addressed developments in the world of American sisters. Moreover, several sources introduced the social and behavioral sciences into the renewal process, at various stages. In this sense, sociology and psychology influenced women religious because these academic fields were already developing theories and exploring ideas that related to the questions women religious were asking about the structures of religious life. Three separate but linked topics of study within the social and behavioral sciences were related to transformation issues: types of authority, small group process, and the nature of “total institutions.” Through the 1940s and 1950s sociologists and later psychologists explored different models of authority, comparing the effect of autocratic, laissez-faire, and democratic systems upon human behavior. During this time period, researchers also created “small group laboratories” to observe human interaction in cooperative endeavors. And, in 1962, Erving Goffman published Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients in which he described and critiqued residential bureaucracies, such as asylums, prisons, and convents. These developments provided a context of sociological ideas for the renewal of women’s religious institutes. Each development and its effect merits individual treatment.

Both authority theory and small group theory originated in situations outside the academic sphere of sociology and psychology. Industrial productivity studies conducted in

the 1920s and 1930s suggested that the behavior of an individual worker was significantly affected by the dynamics of the group of workers to which the individual belonged. Noteworthy among these early industrial encounters with group dynamics was a study of the relationship of lighting to productivity at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant in Chicago. Though the study failed to demonstrate a clear relationship of illumination level to worker output, because productivity increased with each change to the work environment, its results suggested that an unanticipated factor affected work performance. Worker productivity increased when workers perceived themselves to be part of a primary group with a shared common purpose.<sup>70</sup> In subsequent Western Electric "Relay Assembly" and "Bank Wiring" experiments, researchers observed that individual workers based work-related decisions upon an unspoken "group code" of the informal social organization of workers rather than solely upon their individual economic motivation.<sup>71</sup> Both studies suggested that the influence of groups significantly affected the behavior of individuals within those groups.

Other precursors to social-psychological group theory developed within academic explorations of leadership and authority relationships. In 1927 Frederick M. Thrasher published a study of personality, role differentiation, and group culture within the informal organization of boys' gangs in Chicago.<sup>72</sup> In 1943, William Whyte's Street Corner Society further explored the internal power structure of gangs in Boston, and detailed the

---

<sup>70</sup> Michael Olmstead, The Small Group (New York: Random House, 1959), 27. See also C.E. Turner, "Test Room Studies in Employee Effectiveness," American Journal of Public Health 23 (1933): 577-84, reprinted in A. Paul Hare, et al, eds., Small Groups: Studies in Social Interaction (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 54-57.

<sup>71</sup> Olmstead, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Frederick M. Thrasher, The Gang (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), partially reprinted in Hare et al, eds., Small Groups.

social stratification and chain of leadership within the social group of the street gang.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond gang culture, during World War II psychologists attempting to improve soldier morale studied the relationship of the individual soldier to his larger combat unit as a buffer against the stress of combat.<sup>74</sup>

Following World War II, researchers in psychology, anthropology and political science reacted to the rise of authoritarian political regimes in world politics by exploring the effect of differing leadership models on human behavior. Researchers conducted studies about small groups as a way to understand human experience in and response to entire authoritarian societies. Under the leadership of Kurt Lewin, sociologists Ronald Lippert and Ralph White studied the effect of democratic, authoritarian, and laissez-faire leadership styles on groups of eleven-year-old children engaged in specific tasks. Researchers concluded that different leadership models produced corresponding differences both in the cooperation level of the children with one another and in the productivity of the group. Specifically, groups with autocratic leadership were less productive and less cooperative, and tended to be characterized by individual apathy punctuated by moments of group aggression against a child singled out as a "scapegoat." Under laissez-faire leadership, groups were less apathetic, and individual members demonstrated less hostility towards each other, but group progress toward specified tasks was negligible. However, democratic leadership, the study suggested, produced both more cooperative and more productive groups.<sup>75</sup> These early studies of power relationships in groups shaped

---

<sup>73</sup> Olmstead, 36.

<sup>74</sup> Olmstead, 43. For an extended discussion of the relationship of the emergent field of psychology to the United States military during and after the second World War, see Ellen Herman, The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>75</sup> Kurt Lewin, "The Consequences of Authoritarian and Democratic Leadership," in Studies in Leadership, ed. Alvin Gouldner (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 415.

sociologist and psychologist preference for democratic orientation in the group methods they employed in social-psychology laboratory settings.

During the 1950s researchers in the social sciences continued to study small-group interaction. They developed a general theory that two facets, instrumental and expressive, were present and interconnected in all small groups. Initial studies generally focused on one of the facets: either the “locomotion” (the effectiveness of groups engaged in a specific task), or the culture of groups, (including their interpersonal dynamics, personality types, the development of individual roles in them, the creation of group ideals or “fantasies,” and the subjective experience of the individual group members). Early studies produced a corpus of generalizations within social psychology about human interaction in groups. Researchers constructed these conclusions upon a foundational model that understood human beings to be essentially dynamic entities, capable of, indeed, oriented towards perpetual growth and change. The generalizations embodied specific values-- growth, connection, actualization, communication, and cooperation as optimal human experiences-- and hinted at an ultimate goal of human psychological development. Robert Freed Bales addressed several of these value assumptions in a book on individual personalities in groups:

A broad feeling of sympathy extending to the self as well as to others is probably very helpful-- one needs the feeling that not every imperfection and deviation will be punished, or justifies moralistic intervention. A fear of punishment or a harsh conscience is a great interference to understanding others, as well as the self.

But more than this, one needs a positive recognition that persons change, grow, and develop, that creativity is possible and important.<sup>76</sup>

Four of these generalizations by social-psychologists about human experience in small groups would later prove central to group exercises which women religious designed in their community renewal process, and as such merit individual attention. They were: 1)

---

<sup>76</sup> Robert Freed Bales, Personality and Interpersonal Behavior (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1970), 26.

that cooperation is more effective than competition; 2) that change is easier for individuals in groups than for separate individuals; 3) that human beings are essentially interdependent, and their social organizations should reflect their interdependence; and 4) that leadership results not mainly from an individual leader's personality traits but, rather, results from a complex group process of recognition and assent to leadership in varying situations.

Clinical studies of small groups suggested to researchers that cooperation was a more effective group norm than competition when the group goal was change. One study compared puzzle-solving rates among 5-person groups who were rewarded either as a group or as individuals for correct responses. The authors wrote of their results:

the interdependent relationship in which cooperation is rewarded seems to lead to strong motivation to complete the common task and to the development of considerable friendliness among members of the group. . . . Finally, this type of relationship [cooperative] is characterized by a highly effective communication process which tends to promote publication of ideas and great mutual influence.<sup>77</sup>

Researchers concluded that cooperative groups were more effective than groups comprised of autonomous individuals.

In his introductory text The Small Group, Michael Olmstead addressed the question whether corporate change was also accelerated in cooperative group settings.

Research on this question has been frequent in recent years and has given rise to three interrelated generalizations: that group change is easier to bring about than change in individuals, separately; that its effects are more permanent; and that it is more likely to be accepted if the individual participates in the decision.<sup>78</sup>

Kurt Lewin conducted a study of the effects of group self-decision on individual choices (in World War II scarcity diets). Hubert Bonner articulated a perspective similar to Olmstead's in summarizing the results of Lewin's study. "When members of a group

---

<sup>77</sup> Harold Kelley and John Thibaut, "Experimental Studies in Group Problem Solving and Process," Handbook of Social Psychology (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1956), 754.

<sup>78</sup> Olmstead, 69.

themselves have an opportunity to get the facts in a problem situation, they will solve it together and accept the solution because it is the product of their own deliberations.”<sup>79</sup>

Robert Bales also succinctly observed that “Human beings prefer a world they create themselves.”<sup>80</sup> The earliest industrial-related studies suggested that an individual’s relationship to a larger primary group determined their behavior, to a great extent. Later research would confirm that thesis and lead some social psychologists to assert that relationship to a group was the primary determinant of human development and behavior. Indeed, that became the assumption of most group process research. “ We are all dependent,” Bales and colleagues wrote,:

usually more than we know or care to admit, upon consensus with our fellows in drawing lines between different sorts of reality. Even more disturbing-- or perhaps more hopeful-- is the realization that our very ability to experience, to decide, and to control our own behavior through our decision is dependent in many subtle and involuntary ways on our relationship and interaction with our fellows.<sup>81</sup>

Continued research interest in the concept of leadership resulted in theories that redefined it as a phenomenon of group relationship rather than an individual character trait. In his article “Notes on Authoritarian and Democratic Leadership,” Daniel Bell contrasted the conservatism of traditional political conceptions of leadership as the ability to manipulate the “mindless masses,” with the “positivism” of modern sociology, which

sees leadership as a specific response to a specific group situation . . . Leadership is thus seen as a complex social function in which different types of leadership roles emerge as responses to different types of group needs. The basic orientation of this research is to study leadership, not in terms of a series of traits or attributes . . . but in functional terms, as the product of a complex give-and-take among group members. In these terms a leader is not a person marked by destiny or a man with a

---

<sup>79</sup> Hubert Bonner, Group Dynamics: Principles and Applications (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1959), 24,

<sup>80</sup> Bales, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Hare et al, eds., Small Groups, 192. See especially Helen Jennings, “Individual Differences in the Social Atom,” *Ibid.*, 266-74. Jennings begins her essay, “it goes without saying-- the individual cannot be studied apart from the other individuals with whom he is interrelated.”

distinguishable stamp, but one, who because of his own personality structure, may fit the needs of a particular group and emerge as a leader in that situation.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to generalizations about the nature of human beings in groups, social psychologists developed a practical application for these theories: therapeutic, self-analytic groups. Also referred to as “training groups,” “T-groups,” or “human-relations laboratories.” These self-selected and self-referential groups would be widely replicated in business management and educational settings. T-groups would also play a prominent role in later stages of the transformation in specific communities of Catholic sisters.

Building on the idea that, from earliest childhood, an individual’s social environment is the training ground for her or his internal psychological composition, sociologists and psychologists intentionally designed training groups to instill “positive” psychological attributes into the “psychic skeleton” of each participant. Thus, they used T-groups as vehicles to implement ideals of sensitivity, cooperation, empathy for self and others, authenticity, and honest negotiation of conflicts. T-groups provided a group setting in which individual participants were constantly to observe and analyze not only the group’s progress towards a specific goal, but, more importantly, the process and dynamic of the group, and each member, during group interaction. Robert Bales described this focus on “internal situations” in T-groups, writing that “Therapy groups and self-analytic learning or training groups have as a specific formal task the analysis of the characteristics of the group, the members’ actions and motivations.”<sup>83</sup> T-groups taught participants to pay equal attention to the process of a group as they did the group’s results.

T-group theory relied heavily on categorization of human personalities and behaviors as a step toward analyzing their function in the group. Thus a person making a

---

<sup>82</sup> Daniel Bell, “Notes on Authoritarian and Democratic Leadership” in Gouldner, ed., Studies in Leadership, 409-410.

<sup>83</sup> Bales, 114.

statement to the group might be either initiating, seeking information, giving an opinion, clarifying, elaborating, summarizing, consensus testing, harmonizing, gatekeeping, encouraging, compromising, standard-setting or standard-testing.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Robert Bales identified twenty-six personality types with their concomitant roles in group situations. Furthermore, he argued that each personality type was oriented toward a specific "direction" in groups that might work either for the benefit or destruction of positive group process.<sup>85</sup> Specialists in T-groups and sensitivity training used a specific vocabulary of words and phrases such as "authentic relationships," "feedback," "blocking," "self-confirmation," "mutual comprehension." Their students, including women religious, would adopt those terms and apply them to their own situations.

In addition to authority theory and small-group theory, social psychologists of the 1960s developed a critique of coercive bureaucratic institutions. In 1963 Erving Goffman published his study of Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. Though Goffman focused primarily on asylums, he classified them in a larger category he named "total institutions," and characterized them in detail. Goffman characterized a total institution by its breakdown of barriers which normally separated spheres of work, play, and sleep from each other. He described total institutions as a hybrid of a residential community and a formal organization. Thus, in a total institution, all aspects of inmate life were carried on in a single place under single formal authority, in the immediate company of others who were all treated alike and were required to do the same thing together, according to a regimented schedule determined and enforced from above by a system of explicit formal rulings. Total institutions were bureaucracies to manage large

---

<sup>84</sup> NTL National Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, "What to Observe in a T-Group" in Sensitivity Training and the Laboratory Approach: Readings About Concepts and Applications, Robert T. Golembiewski and Arthur Blumberg, eds. (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1970), 88-89.

<sup>85</sup> Bales, 177.

numbers of relatively captive humans. Goffman identified five types of total institutions, according to their stated social purposes: to care for the harmless but incapable (homes for the blind), to care for the incapable who posed a threat to society (tuberculosis sanatoria), to protect the society from intentional dangers (prisons), to further a work task instrumentally (army barracks), and to retreat from the world (abbeys and convents). Goffman wrote: "The handling of many human needs by the bureaucratic organization of whole blocks of people-- whether or not this is a necessary or effective means of social organization-- is the key fact of total institutions."<sup>86</sup> The function of a total institution to manage large numbers of inmates determined its structure.

Goffman continued that the organizational structure of total institutions had specific implications for both their "inmates" and their people-managers, or staff. For example, there was a distinct split between inmates and staff of total institutions, and the task of staff was largely to oversee inmates, "seeing to it that everyone does what he has been clearly told is required of him, under conditions where one person's infraction is likely to stand out in relief against the visible, constantly examined compliance of others."<sup>87</sup> An inmate of a total institution was "generally excluded from knowledge of decisions regarding his fate," and thus remained a passive object of the will of the bureaucracy. Because the "work-payment" incentive structure of society was incompatible with the structure of total institutions, the institutions, by necessity, provided an alternate motive for work, and inspired a different attitude among inmates towards the work required of them than that which prevailed in market society.

For Goffman, the most significant implication of the structure of total institutions was the necessary "disculturation" of inmates by the institution, stripping them

---

<sup>86</sup> Erving Goffman, Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1962), 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

systematically of the “presenting culture” that they brought from their previous life experience to the institution. Goffman argued that total institutions created and maintained, as a method of efficient social control, a constant tension between the worlds inside and outside the institution. The institution forced the inmates to make a radical break with their identity on the outside, and accept in its place an institutionally-determined identity.

Goffman described this break as a shift in the moral career of the inmate, and argued that several aspects of total institution were consciously designed to divest inmates efficiently of previous self understanding. He wrote that “admission procedures might better be called ‘trimming’ or ‘programming’ because in thus being squared away the new arrival allows himself to be shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations.”<sup>88</sup>

Thus, upon entering a total institution, an inmate experienced civil death, role dispossession, property dispossession, and personal defacement. That is, inmates were denied contact with visitors from the outside who could remind them of previous social roles, they were also given obedience tests, were often given a new name that designated their low status within the institution, were stripped of property, and clothing, and given “replacement possessions” that were clearly marked as the property of the institution, altered in appearance and denied equipment and services to maintain previous physical appearance. Additionally, institutions, at times, required the inmate to make gestures of deference and humble verbal responses that further attacked their “identity equipment.” Goffman wrote that in these actions the “embodiment of the self is profaned” and the “territories of self are violated.”<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 23.

Goffman, always sharply critical of the coercive nature of total institutions, reserved his most pointed criticisms for the ways that total institutions divested inmates of their ethical autonomy. Goffman believed that the most profound disruption of inmate identity in a total institution was the “disruption of the usual relationship between the individual actor and his acts.”<sup>90</sup> That is, institutions coopted the “self-expression” of inmates into patterns of deference that denied the inmate any legitimate option of noncompliance with the institution. Goffman labeled this “mortification of the self,” and argued that

Total institutions disrupt and defile precisely those actions that in civil society have the role of attesting to the actor and those in his presence that he has some command over his world-- that he is a person with “adult” self-determination, autonomy, and freedom of action. . . . A margin of self-selected expressive behavior-- whether of antagonism, affection, or unconcern-- is one symbol of self-determination. This evidence of one’s autonomy...is further weakened when this margin of behavior is used as evidence concerning the state of one’s psychiatric, religious or political conscience.<sup>91</sup>

In religious total institutions, this institutional mortification was complemented with self-mortification, because all members of the institution, both inmate and staff, voluntarily accepted mortification. The inmate’s previous moral system was replaced with a privilege system of rewards and punishments according to house rules determined by the institution. Goffman summarized that “in so far as the inmate’s attachment to his civilian self has been shaken by the stripping process of the institution, it is largely the privilege system that provides a framework for personal reorganization.”<sup>92</sup> Total institutions reconstituted inmates according to the institution’s need for bureaucratic efficiency, rather than according to considerations of the integrity or moral autonomy of individual inmates.

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 48.

These developments in the social scientific understanding of total institutions, authority, and human interaction in small groups addressed issues and questions that women religious faced when they began to reform their institutes. Goffman's inclusion of religious congregations among total institutions did not escape the notice of women religious, nor did his critique of the coercion inherent in such institutions. In an article in the National Catholic Reporter, Sr. Aloysius Schaldenbrand applied Goffman's models to women's orders. Her work made Goffman's ideas more accessible to women religious, and thereby spread an awareness of the total institution model across women's congregations. In her book on renewal and noncanonical communities, Lillanna Kopp also recalled Goffman's influence on sisters' evaluations of their communities, writing:

With disbelief, like Rip Van Winkle's after a hundred-year-sleep, sisters of the sixties who were allowed to read freely or attend conferences where sociological or psychological documentation was presented regarding the damage effected by such initiative-suppressing, personality-deforming structures as TOTAL INSTITUTION, faced the devastating realization that TOTAL INSTITUTION was their own religious life pattern of organization.<sup>93</sup>

Goffman's work provided sisters with the sociological framework for a radically different interpretation of the structures that governed their institutes.<sup>94</sup>

If Goffman's work became a tool to diagnose problems in the structure of women's institutes, authority theory and small groups provided remedies to women religious engaged in institutional reform. Sociological dismissal of autocratic forms of authority, in favor of democratic ones, contributed to sisters' transition, following Vatican II, from renewal through hierarchical organizations to renewal through congregational process. Developments in small group models manifested themselves in clearly identifiable forms in the self-studies sisters conducted during the latter half of the renewal. The Benedictine

---

<sup>93</sup> Kopp, Sixth Stage Sisters, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Schaldenbrand's analysis also appeared as "Asylums: Total Societies and Religious Life," in Sr. Charles Borromeo, ed., The New Nuns (New York: New American Library, 1967), 115-27.

Sisters and Sisters of Providence communities of women religious incorporated all of the four cited generalizations about the human character of interdependence, derived from small group theory, into their renewal processes. Self-studies were predicated upon cooperative dialogue among sisters. Studies necessitated community-wide participation throughout the study process, and affirmed that each sister was an integral participant in the transition process. For the Benedictine Sisters, the small-group component of self-studies placed sisters within a context of intimate dialogue where their group solidarity influenced their individual orientation toward the transformation, and thereby diffused possible individual resistance to changes instituted by the transition. The self-study structure implicitly recognized the interdependence of all members of the community. The studies reflected changing conceptions of "leadership" among sisters. The egalitarian tendency of the studies replaced the authority of the superior with the consensus of the community, and study results redefined leadership positions within the communities as instruments of, rather than the determinant of, the group will.

#### Hierarchical Transformation and Providence Heights College of Sister Formation

During the early years of the transformation, the Vatican called for reform among women religious, and sisters responded by creating reform-oriented hierarchical institutions. Pius XII's 1950 and 1951 mandates for improvement in the education of women religious gave rise to the Sister Formation Conference. The Conference, in turn, produced the Everett Curriculum, and established Providence Heights College of Sister Formation as a "Demonstration Center" for the Curriculum. Though Providence Heights existed only thirteen years, it substantially altered the self-perception of women religious in the Pacific Northwest, and established a norm of cooperation among individual sisters and communities. The demise of Providence Heights signaled a shift in sisters' understanding

of their relationship to the lay world, and their relationship to decisions which directly affected their community life.

In 1956, the year of the founding of Providence Heights College, Mother Mary Regina Cunningham, RSM, in a paper to the Midwestern Regional Meeting of the Sister Formation Conference, described a curious dynamic of nontraditional ideas developed within traditional structures that characterized this stage of the transformation. Sr. Cunningham began her paper, entitled "The Integration of the Spiritual and Intellectual Elements in the Formation of Sisters from the Viewpoint of a Higher Superior," with an admonition to superiors to remain vigilant in their duties: "A Higher Superior must have special concern for the complete coordination of her particular Institute."<sup>95</sup> Throughout the paper there is a contrast between the superior, the active educator, and the sister, the passive recipient of formation education: superiors "govern," sisters are "imbued." However, within this traditional, hierarchical structure, Mother Cunningham exhorted superiors to direct their governance activity toward a novel goal-- the intellectual development of the young sister. "Some Superiors in the past thought if they kept their Sisters ignorant they could keep them humble," she said. "The very opposite is true. Let them develop their intellectual powers and they will be convinced that they know little compared to what is to be known about God and His World."<sup>96</sup> In keeping with a central theme of the Formation Conference, Cunningham proposed education that would include attention to the various components that would comprise the sister entire. "Each Sister is a whole person consecrating herself to God, and therefore, the whole person must be

---

<sup>95</sup> Mary Regina Cunningham, RSM, "The Integration of the Spiritual and Intellectual Elements in the Formation of Sisters from the Viewpoint of a Higher Superior." paper presented at the Midwestern Regional Meeting of the Sister Formation Conference, Chicago, Illinois. 27-28 January 1956, page 1, in Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, box 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

developed-- the spiritual, the intellectual, the physical, and the social. Education of the whole person calls for a liberal education."<sup>97</sup>

The 1956 Everett Curriculum Workshop Report detailed a liberal arts college curriculum specifically for sisters in formation, and provided for two Demonstration Centers, as experiments, to implement the curriculum. The curriculum departed drastically from contemporaneous educational practices for postulants and novitiates. The report praised the inter- and intracommunity efforts that had given rise to the curriculum, and stressed that participation of all community members would give strength to sister endeavors. Structurally, the curriculum aimed to replace the "great degree of segmentation and absence of pattern" in academic progress produced by students pursuing degrees in "summer session over a period of a considerable number of years," with a coherent course progression of full-time study.<sup>98</sup> One novel larger objective of the curriculum was to ensure that educational structures would respect, and respond to the sister as an individual learner. "For the Sister," the report explained, "a better liberal education will be one which will take into consideration her special needs, interests, and life aims as well as the role she will be called upon to play in society."<sup>99</sup> The report urged superiors to allow sisters to indicate educational and vocational preferences. Another innovative objective of the plan was to integrate new information coherently into the individual sister's self-understanding, thereby training her "to translate knowledge into action."<sup>100</sup> Sisters educated under the curriculum were to be active, individual, and fully engaged in their work, rather than passive, conforming, and blindly dutiful. The ambitious list of positive effects that the

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>98</sup> Sister Mary Emil Penet, IHM, ed., Report of Everett Curriculum Workshop (Seattle: Heiden's Mailing Bureau, 1956), 4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 21.

Everett Report claimed would result from the implementation of the curriculum reflected the optimism of the authors: "a renewal of religious life through the formation of holier, more adjusted, and more effective Sisters; an increase in vocation through the influence of sisters formed in such a program; and the extension of works of mercy."<sup>101</sup> The Curriculum was a dramatic departure from previous educational practices, and a bold step towards renewal.

Immediately after the 1956 publication of the Everett Curriculum Report the two demonstration colleges outlined in the report were founded: the College of Saint Teresa, and Providence Heights College of Sister Formation. The Sisters of Providence (SP) conducted Providence Heights College in cooperation with three other communities of women religious: the Sisters of St. Joseph of Newark (in Bellevue), the Sisters of St. Dominic of the congregation St. Thomas Aquinas (in Tacoma), and the Sisters of St. Dominic of the congregation of the Holy Cross (in Edmonds). The Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province,<sup>102</sup> directed the formation of Providence Heights College, though the college was also an institutional branch of Seattle University. The faculty and students of Providence Heights were entirely separate from those of the University, though Seattle University granted the degree to sisters who graduated from the College. The Everett Report suggested that "The [Providence] Center will . . . continue to function as part of the University-- the teachers having faculty status and perhaps teaching some classes at the University, and the University assuming responsibility for the maintenance of high standards in the carrying out of the program."<sup>103</sup> This separate-but-equal relationship of Providence Heights College to Seattle University would take different forms during the college's brief lifetime, but the separateness of the sisters from the other university students

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>102</sup> A province is a territorial unit of a religious order. The Sacred Heart Province included the communities of the sisters of Providence in Oregon, Washington, Alaska.

<sup>103</sup> Penet, 112.

remained constant.

The organizational focus and guiding principle of Providence Heights was strict adherence to the Everett Curriculum.<sup>104</sup> By attending classes for four quarters per year for five years, sister-students of Providence Heights would graduate with 230 to 240 academic credits (Seattle University required only 196 credits for a B.A.)<sup>105</sup> The academic program of the College would rest on a foundation of two simultaneous, but distinct, sequences in theology and philosophy “to provide the Sister with an intellectual grasp of the spiritual life that will be based on understanding rather than on emotion or sentimentality.”<sup>106</sup> Within this framework, the student would also follow a sequence in the behavioral sciences “bearing directly on the Sister’s understanding of herself as a person and placed with reference to her special needs in the total learning situation.”<sup>107</sup> Behavioral science courses would prepare the sister for her later vocation in a “work of mercy.” The Everett Curriculum Report stressed that the goal of the curriculum at Providence Heights would be that “the behavioral sciences will be brought to a point of functional unity in the solving of human problems and the promotion of social welfare.”<sup>108</sup> In its strict adherence to the ideals of the Everett Curriculum, Providence Heights was to be the test case of the curriculum’s feasibility and effectiveness.

Providence Heights College developed first according to an “interim,” and then a “regular,” plan.<sup>109</sup> During the interim phase (1956-60) the College operated on the Seattle

---

<sup>104</sup> Beane, 145.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Doyle, “College for Nuns: Seattle University Is Meeting Head On the Greatest Challenge in Catholic Education,” Catholic Digest, October 1959, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Penet, 21.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Beane, 144.

University campus, while it made preparations to function as a unit separate from its university sponsor. During these years the orders participating in Providence Heights College constructed a campus for the College in an eastern suburb of Seattle, and sent sisters they had chosen to be the faculty of the College to complete their doctoral training. Meanwhile, sisters in formation attended special separate classes on the campus of Seattle University, taught by select Jesuit faculty from the University. They occupied temporary housing facilities.<sup>110</sup> During the interim phase, sister-students were separate, but not isolated, from the lay students of Seattle University. In 1959 a writer in Catholic Digest observed that "Anyone crossing the campus will see nuns chatting with students, or waiting in line at the bookstore, or checking out books at the library. The sisters don't paint election posters, or sit in the student cafeteria, or pledge service fraternities, or become cheerleaders, but they are now an organic part of the student body."<sup>111</sup> The following year, as "Steel, Concrete, and Chipped Glass Rise to the Glory of God" in the nearly completed campus, sisters prepared for their transition to an exclusive religious environment.<sup>112</sup>

The regular phase (1961-69) of the College began with the completed construction of the Issaquah, Washington campus. The six-million-dollar campus (also referred to in Province documents as Pine Lake) contained nine buildings, including a library, laboratory, and housing capable of accommodating three hundred sisters, set on a 243-acre tract of coniferous wilderness.<sup>113</sup> On June 14, 1961, the faculty and students of the

---

<sup>110</sup> Agreement between the Sisters of Providence and Seattle University for Providence Heights College of Sister Formation, 29 July 1960, in Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Seattle, Washington, Box 2.

<sup>111</sup> Doyle, 4.

<sup>112</sup> Providence Heights 1960 Progress Report, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>113</sup> News Release, Sister Formation Conference, 29 September 1958, Archives of

College, as well as the offices of the Sacred Heart Provincialate, moved to Pine Lake.<sup>114</sup> The campus was formally dedicated on July 21, 1961, and classes began immediately in the new facility.<sup>115</sup> A brochure written by the College at this time expressed the sense of accomplishment and optimism that sisters felt about the College. “UNLIMITED HORIZONS,” the writer proudly announced, “the pioneer steps have been taken in creating a new dimension in education in the Northwest. The dynamic program is underway . . . . Creative thinking does not stop now. The horizons are unlimited.”<sup>116</sup> For the next six years the Providence Heights College of Sister Formation educated and formed young sisters within the confines of its lush, cloistered grounds. Then, with Vatican II, its horizon changed.

The theological innovations of Vatican II precipitated many changes in Catholic religious life, among them was a new fluidity of the boundary between laity and vowed religious. No longer were sisters and other religious, in their different “states of perfection,” to be existentially separate from nonreligious church members. Rather, as the Vatican now considered the laity able to pursue holiness in their secular lives, the spiritual gulf between religious and laity narrowed. The rule which mandated strict separation of religious from nonreligious church members was no longer germane. This theological shift had two significant implications for Providence Heights and its model of the college for sisters. First, the enclosure and separation of sisters on the Providence Heights campus was incompatible with the spirit of integration that emerged from Vatican II. Consequently,

---

the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>114</sup> Moving plan, [June 1961], Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>115</sup> Beane, 145.

<sup>116</sup> Providence Heights College Brochure, [1970-71] Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

the college could no longer justify its exclusivity in strictly theological terms. In addition, Vatican II decreased the uniquely sanctified status of sisters, in contrast to lay women, that had previously drawn some women to religious communities. For this reason, as well as reasons related to the changing status of women in the United States in the late 1960s, fewer women professed to orders of religious following Vatican II, and fewer women enrolled in the College of Sister Formation. The effects of Vatican II challenged both the spiritual and the pragmatic justifications for the existence of Providence Heights College.

Recognizing that these challenges faced Providence Heights, the Intercommunity Council of the College of Sister Formation<sup>117</sup> appointed an evaluating committee to study the college's formation program.<sup>118</sup> The special committee met several times during the autumn of 1967. On November 21 Provincial Superior Cecilia Abhold wrote a circular letter to inform sisters of the Sacred Heart Province of the conclusions the committee had reached. She indicated that the committee reported that Providence Heights had diminishing value, and that there might be a conflict between Vatican II and the cloistered structure of the college. Sr. Abhold wrote: "The emphasis of Vatican II on the diminution of enclosure and separation has called for an alteration in our Sister Formation Program. In addition, the Holy Spirit seems to be speaking to us in a very practical manner."<sup>119</sup> Specifically, the committee had concluded that both the declining number of recruits, and the increasingly diverse educational backgrounds of recent entering postulants were

---

<sup>117</sup> The Intercommunity Council of the Providence Heights College of Sister Formation consisted of the superiors and formation directors of the communities participating in the College, together with the dean, assistant dean, and representatives of Seattle University.

<sup>118</sup> Sister Cecilia Abhold, SP, Provincial Superior circular letter to Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, 21 November 1967, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

seriously diminishing the prospects of Providence Heights.<sup>120</sup> The committee found that Providence Heights could not remain in its then present form.

On December 4, the Intercommunity Council issued a Progress Report that outlined future changes for Providence Heights, in response to the findings of the evaluating committee. The council recognized that the current program contained values which it should preserve in future changes, among them the “strong theology and philosophy sequences,” having “academic and professional preparation completed before professional assignment,” and “continued cooperation among the participating communities.”<sup>121</sup> However, it also noted several problems that required immediate redress, such as the current course structure that left little room for student electives “to take care of individual differences,” and declining enrollment projections. The council also concluded that the enclosure of sisters in the College setting posed problems for religious communities:

Separation of students from persons of various ages resulted in their remaining for too many years in class with the same students. Isolated from the larger community and living five or six years with their own age group makes integration into the local community difficult when they are missioned. Separation between young and old is emphasized, adjustment to the laity is made more difficult, and stability in religious life is weakened since young sisters have not had the broadening experiences of living with many different kinds of people which ordinarily contributes to maturity.<sup>122</sup>

The Council recommended that Providence Heights close, and the orders transfer their sister-students into secular educational institutions.

After a two-year phaseout period, Providence Heights College of Sister Formation officially closed June 1, 1969. In their explanations for the college’s demise, sisters stressed the theological changes, rather than the enrollment decline. In a press release, the

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Progress Report of the Intercommunity Council of the College of Sister Formation of Seattle University, 4 December 1967, 1, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 2.

college reiterated that the decision to close the school was based largely on evolving ideas about the proper education of sisters. Sr. Alice St. Hilaire, SP, associate dean of the college, explained that "A decade ago emphasis was on a strong educational program for young sisters coupled with withdrawal from the secular world. The educational emphasis remains. But since Vatican II, it is now believed better for sisters in training to be in contact with society rather than isolated for five to seven years."<sup>123</sup> Years later, Sr. Cecilia Abhold used similar language to describe sisters' decision to close Providence Heights:

We felt that this was going to absolutely perfect in the way sisters are prepared. The years that we were holding sisters out there [Providence Heights] was five. Five years turned out to separate the sisters from what was going on in the world, and then we sent them into the world to do the work. It just didn't jibe. . . . When we found that out we said: "We cannot continue doing this, so what is our option? What, you know, what does this demand of us? Well, we have to leave this place because it is too isolated for them." That was the result. That was very difficult for them [the sisters] to accept: to think that we would build an institution like this and in seven years close it. Facts are facts. We made a mistake. And so that's how we recouped.<sup>124</sup>

Sisters of the participating orders reacted with ambivalence to the decision. Some expressed grief at the loss of an institution in which they had made considerable personal investment. Others rejoiced in the progress that the closing signified. Sr. Hilaire's and Sr. Abhold's offices were flooded with letters from sisters whose lives had been, in some way, affected by the College. Sr. Genevieve Gorman, SP, who had been active in the founding of Providence Heights, wrote to Sr. Hilaire: "I wonder if you have any idea how sad many of us are about the whole affair in spite of the fact that Vatican II has made it necessary to make some changes in preservice formation." "I hope you will understand," she continued, "although I honestly question that you and the others connected with the

---

<sup>123</sup> Press release from Seattle University, Office of Public Information, 18 April 1969, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>124</sup> Abhold interview. Sr. Abhold's statement that Providence Heights College of Sister Formation was closed after seven years refers to the seven year regular stage that the college occupied the Pine Lake campus. It does not include the five year interim period that preceded it at Seattle University.

'demolition' of the CSF [College of Sister Formation] and of Providence Heights, can know the depths of sorrow which some of us experience through it all."<sup>125</sup> Sr. Hilaire, in a lengthy reply, encouraged Sr. Genevieve to view the closing as a painful, but nonetheless necessary, step in the continuing process of modernization. She reassured Sr. Genevieve that "the short-lived aspect of the project does not in any way make it less great . . . . [W]e could not possibly have moved from where we were then to where we are now without either the in-between step of the CSF or something equally as innovative and daring." Sr. Hilaire also pointed out that the College of Sister Formation left behind legacies of transformation that would continue to flourish, such as intercommunity cooperation whereby

we religious in the Northwest work together as a matter of fact. How do you account for that if not by the courage and perseverance of yourself and your intercommunity co-workers who overcame unbelievable obstacles to establish a formation program with the happy arrangement that young sisters would grow up in religious life where working and sharing with other communities is as natural as breathing?<sup>126</sup>

The story of Providence Heights College of Sister Formation exemplified the institutional stage of the transformation of American women religious, between 1950 and 1965. The College reflected clearly the duality of substantial reforms that sisters enacted within traditional, hierarchical structures in the years prior to and during the Second Vatican Council. On one hand, Providence Heights College was a radical new approach to the education of sisters. As an institution, it embodied sisters' emerging self-confidence, self-reliance, and shift from conformity to individuation in community. Its curriculum was specifically and consciously designed to respond to the individual capacities and interests of

---

<sup>125</sup> Sr. Genevieve Gorman, SP, to Sr. Alice St. Hilaire, SP, 3 March 1969, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

<sup>126</sup> Sr. Alice St. Hilaire, SP, to Sr. Genevieve Gorman, SP, 7 March 1969, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, Box 2.

each sister-student, rather than to mold those distinct facets of personality into a uniform sister archetype. The college also strove to form the sister as an integrated being, so that spiritual, intellectual, and professional formation would strengthen each other in the program, rather than compete for a novice's attention. Though it originated in a response to Vatican requests for improved education for sisters, Providence Heights College was equally the product of sisters' initiative and cooperation to create, for themselves, solutions to sister-specific educational problems. Not only was the curriculum designed solely by sisters through the Everett Curriculum Workshop, but the College staff was composed entirely of sister-professors.

Paradoxically, sisters implemented and actualized these innovations in sister formation through an institutional structure whose stasis demonstrated the continuity of inherited notions of authority and order among women religious throughout the pre-Vatican II years of the transformation. Several facets of Providence Heights reflected traditional ideas of hierarchical authority and the status of sisters in the Church. The Everett Curriculum, which precipitated the establishment of Providence Heights, was itself the product of a hierarchical institution, the Sister Formation Conference. Both were created through sisters' acts of obedience to directives from the highest chair of Church authority, the Pope. The Everett Curriculum Workshop Report reinforced traditional channels of authority by its deference to the responsibility and concomitant authority of each major superior to oversee the formation process of young sisters under her governance.<sup>127</sup> Additionally, though planners intended the curriculum to be adaptable to the capacities of the individual sister, its core was a comprehensive and highly regimented course progression that left little room for significant variation. Finally, the idea-- embedded in the

---

<sup>127</sup> It should be noted that the Everett Curriculum project also exemplified the emergent influence of a different kind of hierarchy, namely that of academic experts and program planners. The authority of professional expertise would be central to post-Vatican II renewal.

College of Sister Formation-- of removing sisters from educational contact with lay persons testified to a continuing expectation that religious would inhabit a spiritual place distinct from lay society, and moreover indicated a paternalistic attitude toward the young sister which sought to insulate her from the supposedly corrupting influence of life outside the cloister.<sup>128</sup>

The liberal education of the College of Sister Formation forever changed the way that women religious viewed their education, each other, and themselves. Because of Providence Heights, sisters in the Northwest believed that they were entitled to excellent and comprehensive education before vocational engagement. Through their work of building and maintaining the College, sisters gained valuable experience in interorder cooperation. Orders began to view each other as colleagues and resources rather than as competitors. They learned the collective strength of speaking and acting in concert. The sisters educated at Providence Heights were empowered to be responsible for their own education, direction, and work. Some of them took this infectious spirit back to their orders, in which they were the youngest members, and propagated it among more seasoned sisters. The seed of sisters' ability to define themselves, which had germinated in the genesis of the Sister Formation Conference, sprouted behind the enclosed walls of Providence Heights. It would flower in the collegiality of the years after Vatican II.

#### Collegial Transformation and Community Self-Studies

Prior to Vatican II sisters had already experienced transformation within institutions created and maintained by traditional, hierarchical Church structures. After the Council

---

<sup>128</sup> Mary Schneider, The Transformation of American Women Religious: The Sister Formation Conference As Catalyst for Change (1954-1964) (South Bend, Indiana: Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, University of Notre Dame, 1986) Working paper series 17, no. 1, 10.

laid a theological and structural foundation for participation of members of orders in modernizing decisions, women religious in the United States began to exert a powerful influence in the renewal process within their communities. Drawing both upon the resources of self-determination that they had gained in the pre-Council years of the transformation, and upon sociological models of small group process, sisters turned the original papal idea of community “participation” on its head. Many rejected hierarchy and its implied obedience to hierarchical structures and authority figures, and proposed to replace it with collegiality and obedience to God. These sisters didn’t merely state opinions on the transition; they drove it. Orders restructured themselves to place the authority for decisions concerning the rules and governing structures in the hands of their own members.

The evolutionary nature of the transformation following Vatican II renders it nearly impossible to periodize changes after 1965. As the initiative that introduced changes to religious life shifted from the central institutions of the Church to individuals and communities of religious, the process naturally became more diffuse and diverse. Manifestations of modernization varied from community to community and from individual to individual. Vatican mandate gave way to community dialogue, and change happened not in dramatic shifts, but rather through gradual and incremental alteration of existing patterns. The difficulty of generalizing about this stage is further complicated by the sheer diversity of orders of religious women, with their distinctive constitutions, rules, and systems of governance. The transformation process for a specific congregation was shaped by its unique structure and the general orientation of the order.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Limits of documentary evidence present another difficulty to the researcher. To the extent that decisions about modernization were made in general or chapter meetings of a community, order, or province, where limited notes were taken on the proceedings or discussion, there remains little written documentation of specific decisions. The sisters who attended the meetings, and written instruments such as self studies, are the sources

To avoid the pitfalls of generalization, it is necessary to explore the second stage of the transformation within the boundaries of specific communities. This paper examines two different orders of sisters in the Pacific Northwest: the apostolic Sisters of Providence (SP), Sacred Heart Province, and the monastic Benedictine Sisters, Queen of Angels community, Mount Angel, Oregon. The different structure and size of the two congregations affected the sociological tools they chose to conduct their self-studies. The larger and more diffuse Sisters of Providence congregation used surveys and sociometric tests that were easily distributed over a larger geographic area. The localized Benedictine Sisters utilized a consensual study that reflected their congregational preference for central, dialogic community.

#### Collegial Transformation, Part One : Sisters of Providence and Sociometry

As early as 1958 the Sisters of Providence were beginning to experiment with alternatives to purely hierarchical models of decision making. In January of that year Provincial Superior Mother Mary Philothea mailed a questionnaire to all sisters in the province, asking them to respond to eighteen questions about the traditional habit, and to solicit their opinion on proposals to change it.<sup>130</sup> Though the authority to make the final decision still rested within the hierarchy of the province superiors, this attempt to take into account the opinions of general sisters marked a significant democratization of discussion

---

most accessible to the researcher on post-Vatican II transformation within a specific order or community.

<sup>130</sup> This decision may in part have resulted from Mother Mary Philothea's progressive orientation toward the renewal of women religious. In addition to being a central figure in the Sister Formation Conference in the Pacific Northwest, she also strongly believed in sisters' right to define themselves. Sr. Alberta Dieker, OSB, recalled that during one regional meeting of the Sister Formation Conference, after a bishop had given the invocation and left, Mother Philothea looked at the room of congregated sisters and declared, "Sisters, we are on our own." Dieker interview.

about facets of religious life that directly affected sisters. Sisters responded enthusiastically to the opportunity. Of the 416 sisters who responded, 373 rejected the idea of keeping the existing habit, unchanged.<sup>131</sup> The sisters' general remarks reflected an awareness of papal mandates to update religious garb, and a posture of willing submission to papal authority. Most sisters' comments included statements to the effect that:

The Holy Father has asked that we adapt to modern times. . . . Should this be so difficult to do?<sup>132</sup>  
I feel we should go the whole way the Holy Father has asked. Modernize the habit. Now that the Holy Father has spoken, let us act.<sup>133</sup>

In a lengthy statement on the serious need to revise the habit, a sister commented, "Our Holy Father wishes us to modernize; let us do it the whole way--not just by taking out one pleat or disposing of the long sleeves." One sister even suggested that the advantage of adaption would be "the blessing of God for our wholehearted obedience to the wish of the Holy Father."<sup>134</sup> The submissive tone of sisters' responses indicates that during the early years of the transition they understood their participation in the process of change to be an act of obedience to familiar channels of religious authority.

Sisters recognized that a change in the habit might effect other changes, both positive and negative, within the community. One sister optimistically stated her belief that the habit change would produce positive results:

If our spirituality is solid; if we are zealous and eager for souls and our own salvation according to the rules of our institute; if we are obedient and virtuous; if we love our community and all that it stands for; then I do not see that change to a more contemporary garb would in any way diminish the assets of our wonderful community. In fact, I think they would be enhanced by our realizing the wisdom

---

<sup>131</sup> Tabulated Results of the Holy Habit Questionnaire, 28 February 1958, 1, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, "Habit" folder, Box 189.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

and love of this good mother [the Provincial superior] and we would strive even more to become worthy daughters.<sup>135</sup>

A few sisters cautioned that rapid change to the habit might cause dissension within the community. One sister suggested, "Since the sisters are not spiritually ready for a drastic change, it should be done gradually but they should be psychologically prepared for further change." Another responded, "Since we would not wish to cause our senior sisters unhappiness by any changes in the habit why would it not be well to leave them free to wear it or not?"; a third respectfully requested "the possibility of allowing those who wish to modernize the habit, wear it that way, while at the same time allowing the ones who do not wish to change to continue wearing the present habit."<sup>136</sup> The sisters acknowledged that change, and diversity of dress, might provoke, or perhaps uncover, generational or ideological conflicts within the community.

Other sisters attempted to dispel fears that alterations to the habit would have a negative spiritual effect upon sisters. One sister asked, "Would a shorter skirt or more modern garb in any way diminish our dedication to the works of mercy? Would we not be able to perform them with greater perfection if not weighted down with seven pounds of clothing?"<sup>137</sup> Another wrote, "I have often felt that the religious garb as it is now designed (and ours is the most beautiful of them all) is at times a barrier between me and the people I hoped to help by becoming a nun." She continued, "How sad to think that a nonconsequential item such as a way of dressing could in any way diminish the fulfillment of our work for the CHURCH."<sup>138</sup> Whether they feared or embraced the imminent

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 7.

changes, sisters sensed that their world soon would be irrevocably altered.

Though a few sisters requested that the habit remain unaltered, (“I love it as is”), most agreed that, for practical reasons, the habit needed to be changed. “I am in favor of any change to the holy habit which would make it more comfortable, neater, easier to keep clean, simpler to make,” one wrote.<sup>139</sup> Sisters’ specific recommendations for changes included the practical and the fanciful, the serious and the comical. “I believe the skirt should be shortened to just below the calf of the leg,” one sister suggested.<sup>140</sup> Another stated: “If we are going to change our habit as the Holy Father wishes then let us have a nice suit and hat. We could wear a little veil at home.”<sup>141</sup> One sister made the pragmatic suggestion, “Let us wear what we need.”<sup>142</sup> Another remarked, “Let us not have skimpy skirts!”<sup>143</sup> “I am in favor of pastel shades for summer habits,” a sister commented.<sup>144</sup> A sister concluded her comments with the complaint that “People wonder what we are doing when we start to fish up our capes for our watches. It does not look right and it feels worse. Must we always be so very different in so many little nonessential ways like this? I wish the sisters could wear wrist watches.” Recognizing the unusual nature of the questionnaire’s inquiry into sister opinion, the report noted that many sisters, regardless of their opinions on the habit issue, wrote additional “thank you” notes “for being able to express their opinion on the matter.”<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 7, 1.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 15.

Change did not come quickly. After the survey, the province superiors exhibited extreme caution in altering the habit. In 1965, more than six years after the habit questionnaire was tabulated, Sister Elaina wrote to Provincial Superior Mother Mary Loretta<sup>146</sup> to volunteer to wear one of the modified habits that had been designed, but not yet implemented. She gently echoed many of the stresses that women religious felt under the traditional structures and rules--stresses that they would move quickly to resolve after collegial decision-making would give them a role in the renewal process. Sr. Elaina explained her request by reminding Mother that "in this work with very young children a less ostentatious dress would be desirable." She continued, stating a principle that would shape many of the future decisions of sister-initiated transformation: "I would be much more comfortable ecumenically if I could be seen [vocationally] as one who is 'your sister in Christ' [rather] *than as one set apart.*"<sup>147</sup> She concluded her letter by offering her submission to Mother's authority in this matter, assuring her that she would "abide by your [Mother's] decision with joy and good will." Sr. Elaina did not have to wait long for the uneven pace of change to accelerate. The Second Vatican Council had just adjourned, and its effects would ripple through her community in the coming year.

Three months after Sr. Elaina wrote to request permission to wear the new habit, Mother Mary Loretta wrote a letter to all the sisters in her province that would forever change the Sisters of Providence in the Pacific Northwest. She acknowledged that "Superiors are aware that our sisters are vitally interested in the developments suggested by the Constitutions proceeding from the Vatican Council." In response to their desire for inclusion in the renewal process, she announced that the province would hold regional

---

<sup>146</sup> "Mother Mary Loretta" was her name in religion, given to her by her order. After women religious reclaimed their birth names she used her birth name, Cecilia Abhold.

<sup>147</sup> Sr. Elaina, SP to Mother Mary Loretta (Cecilia Abhold), SP, 19 September 1965, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, "Habit" folder, Box 189. Italics added by author.

meetings to provide a forum for sister discussion of issues related to revision of community life. She chose her words cautiously to reflect the uncertainty that accompanied the initial steps towards a more democratic process within orders. "Just how we are to renew ourselves and our works . . . is one of the matters in need of consideration by all the sisters. In a spirit of generous openness and confidence in the sisters, they [the superiors of the General Chapter] have offered the opportunity for sisters to come together in regional groups to discuss, in a friendly and sisterly way, the beginnings of our own thinking."<sup>148</sup> In a later interview Sr. Abhold vividly described the conflict that preceded her decision to initiate the regional meetings:

Sisters had never met before in one total group. So all of the sudden the question came up: "Isn't it time for the total community to come together and talk about these things?" (I was the provincial at the time.) And that was, I would say that that was probably the hardest, the most difficult decision to make that I can remember, because there were those who said: "If you bring all of the sisters together, there's going to be so much difference of opinion that there's going to be a split in the community, in the province." Now that was a very threatening statement, to think: "What is my decision going to make? What is it going to cause in this community? Am I going to break it up? Or is it going to be for the betterment of the community?" I had to struggle and struggle with that answer. And finally I said: "I'm going to go with the vision that the younger people in the community are the future of the community, and I hear more of the need for this from them. And therefore my decision is, we will meet."<sup>149</sup>

The regional gatherings of the Sacred Heart Province, which met January 8 and 9, 1966, marked the order's transition from largely hierarchical to increasingly democratic models of authority. The new openness created both tension and opportunity for sisters. The meetings freed them to discuss long repressed, and frequently painful, experiences of religious life. Once they had expressed these grievances, sisters used the meeting format to address problematic elements of community life. Cecilia Abhold later remembered that:

---

<sup>148</sup> Mother Mary Loretta (Cecilia Abhold), SP, Provincial Superior circular letter to Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, 18 December 1965, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, "Habit" folder, Box 189.

<sup>149</sup> Abhold interview.

There were many difficulties, because sisters suddenly felt that they could speak. They could speak their minds, and it didn't matter what they said, they were able to speak. And some of them were very good at speaking, and telling of their pains and struggles. And there were tears. It was a real hardship. And yet God gave me the grace to sit there and listen to all of that and know this is not going to break us apart. This openness is going to be helpful.<sup>150</sup>

In addition to tears and openness, the meetings brought forth communication among sisters about issues of modernization. The meetings established democratic governing structures, such as committees, which sisters used to determine or vote for the direction and specific forms of change within their community. Community meetings became a regular part of the renewal process of the province. Sr. Abhold found that the continuation of the meetings became a catalyst for substantive change within community governing structures: "We have met ever since [1966]. And from that came the formation of the committee system. . . . Committees formed agendas to bring up at that time. They would discuss among their own groups what they thought should be proposed."<sup>151</sup>

A few years later, in addition to community meetings, the Sisters of Providence pursued community transformation through a more democratic process, a sociometric survey. In 1972 the province conducted a sociometric survey of all its sisters to gauge their perceptions about community issues, evaluate their satisfaction with changes that had been implemented, and determine province priorities for future stages of renewal. The survey, conducted by a professional consultant, comprised 541 statements about community life, with which sisters were either to agree or to disagree. The survey covered five topics: the meaning of community, governance, formation, prayer life, and religious garb.<sup>152</sup> The survey presented questions in mixed order within the actual survey. The

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> J. Robert Larson, ed., "Province Survey," August 1972, Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province, "Province Survey" file.

survey report conveyed results according to the percentage of sisters who agreed with each statement. The instrument of the survey, as well as the results, reflected deeper transformations of individual and community-self perceptions in this later stage of the renewal process. The province affirmed essential human freedom, the voluntary nature of religious community, and the centrality of decision by consensus within egalitarian authority structures. Survey results confirmed that the values upon which small-group laboratories were predicated were either heavily represented in the survey instrument, or the perceptions of the Sisters of Providence, or both.

Sociometric tests were a written instrument of small-group process. Their designers asked respondents to either affirm or reject specific statements about the group. Designed by the psychiatrist J. L. Moreno to provide a picture of a group's internal structure, in a more general sense the new device asked groups to evaluate themselves. Social-psychologist and researcher Michael Olmstead asserted that sociometric tests were primarily "useful theoretically in providing insights into the group structure as it is perceived by its inhabitants."<sup>153</sup> Moreno attributed a larger purpose to the test method he designed. He wrote:

According to Sociometry, society systems are preference or attraction-repulsion systems. . . . It is also claimed that human preferential systems cannot be examined adequately by the old methods of fact-finding objectivity as statistical methods and observational methods, but that the methods themselves and the instruments derived from them have to undergo a process of *subjectification* in order to return to the researcher endowed with a more profound objectivity, having gained a grasp of the social processes at depth level.<sup>154</sup>

Moreno believed that sociometric tests allowed larger groups to perceive themselves as entities through researching themselves. Consequently, he reasoned, the tests were also a

---

<sup>153</sup> Olmstead, 98.

<sup>154</sup> J. L. Moreno, "Contributions of Sociometry to Research Methodology in Sociology" in Hare, et al, eds., Small Groups, 99.

written form of group self-analysis, which would bring about *transformative results* comparable to those of the face-to-face interaction of smaller T-groups. Moreno further described this use of the sociometric test:

A community of a thousand people for instance, became animated by sociometric devices to account for their sociological feelings and possibly to correct them. Sociometry became, then, paraphrasing the famous saying of [President Abraham] Lincoln: *the sociology of the people, by the people, and for the people*. The operation of sociological research became itself socio (mass) centered instead of individual centered.<sup>155</sup>

The Sacred Heart Province encompassed the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, and a small portion of Canada. The sheer size of the Province, and lack of geographic proximity of communities within the Province rendered a small group-based self study impractical if not impossible. The sociometric survey the Province utilized allowed Province sisters to explore perceptions of self and community within the community as a whole. Though the survey did not provide the immediate dialogue and practical experience in consensus decision process that a small group (T-group) study may have, it did show sisters that their individual perceptions were part of a larger group awareness among them.

The Providence survey results indicated that between the 1965 regional meetings and the 1972 survey, both the structures and the philosophy of the religious congregation had undergone a profound transformation from a hierarchical to a democratic orientation. Sisters by clear majorities affirmed statements that articulated ideas of individual autonomy among sisters, personal growth, voluntary sacrifice and participation, orientation toward small groups of sisters, collegiality, obedience to God rather than to Church authority figures, flexible community structures, and individual responsibility.<sup>156</sup> The lack of clear majorities about many statements in the survey, as well as the conflict orientation of some

---

<sup>155</sup> Moreno in *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>156</sup> Larson, ed., "Province survey."

of the questions posed, suggest that a fair amount of tension remained within the province over ideas of modernization and community direction.<sup>157</sup>

In the 1972 survey, Sisters of Providence used their responses to redefine “community” and its meaning. According to the survey results, they understood community not as a place, but as a sharing of goals, “affection and encouragement, of sympathy and intimacy, of truth and love between free and autonomous individuals.”<sup>158</sup> In a statement that affirmed the voluntary nature of community, 91.7 percent of sisters agreed that “Community is achieved when individuals can give and receive because they want to, not because they are compelled by the system.” Sisters also expressed a preference for small, semiautonomous living groups rather than for large institutional living arrangements. Three-fourths agreed that groups should comprise ten or fewer sisters.<sup>159</sup> Though the women affirmed with significant dissent (by 69.2 percent) that diversity of lifestyles should be permitted by community, they overwhelmingly agreed (94.8 percent) that both modern and traditional sisters must make an effort to “accept each other’s way of life as being genuine ways of living lives which are dedicated to God.”<sup>160</sup> By affirming that meaning of religious community, the sisters reflected deeper changes in their self-perceptions. Their explicit ideal of a voluntary community of women who shared with and accepted each other

---

<sup>157</sup> For example, sisters were divided evenly (48.9 percent disagreed and 46.7 percent agreed) in their response to a statement that “So much stress is placed on freedom today that the notion of obedience is all but gone.” Some statements in the survey suggested possible areas of conflict between sisters at the time. The survey contains several statements on generational conflict within the order, such as the contention that “young sisters are taught to ridicule religious life practices of the past” (69.6 percent disagreed) and the assertion that “much of what young sisters are doing is disrespectful of the cherished ways of the past” (63.6 percent disagreed). *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, figures reflect the percentage of sisters who agreed with the corresponding statement.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

was predicated upon their implicit understanding that each sister would be a free and autonomous participant in the congregation. The participation of self-actualized and individuated sisters in community would, by definition, be voluntary, for such sisters would neither require, nor tolerate, participation coerced by institutional structures.

In their responses, the sisters also expressed a strong preference for decision by consensus within egalitarian authority structures. Though sisters affirmed “decision making by common agreement” by 63.1 percent, they also favored “solution of problems by open discussion” by 94.5 percent. The sisters showed strong agreement on principles of self-governance. The women affirmed by 96.6 percent a statement that “individuals in small groups ought to participate in decisions that directly affect their lives.”<sup>161</sup> They also agreed that “the expression ‘local coordinator’ better expresses the notion of collegiality than does ‘local superior’” (78.85 percent), and maintained that a superior had no right, by herself, to interpret the Constitution or Rule for members of the order (70.4 percent).<sup>162</sup> Sisters’ preference for nonhierarchical authority, like their understanding of the concept of community, conveyed implicit assumptions about the sovereignty of each sister in matters related to community life.

In the survey, sisters redefined concepts of authority and obedience according to their understanding of human freedom. They asserted that “the individual grows and matures as a human being and as a woman dedicated to God by discovering how God acts in her life and then with this awareness makes choices of her own and assumes the fullest possible responsibility for those choices.”<sup>163</sup> Sisters preferred to replace the “inhuman blind obedience to authority,” that 73.9 percent agreed had characterized the community in

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 6.

the previous decade, with “an authority structure that supports human freedom” (92.4 percent). Two-thirds of women affirmed a statement that “Command intelligently assented to is a virtuous obedience; command obeyed merely because it has come from one in authority is a shackle.”<sup>164</sup> More than 80 percent of sisters agreed that the rigid, formal structure of the past had asserted a “dangerous” pressure on individuals to conform to preordained norms. By narrower majorities, sisters affirmed related statements that past obedience had been a (conscious or unconscious) “way of avoiding acceptance of responsibility for one’s acts” (60.9 percent),<sup>165</sup> and that “individual responsibility for keeping the rule is sufficient; being responsible to another sister is superfluous” (65.5 percent).<sup>166</sup>

Sisters initially expressed their individual understandings of both the ideal and the reality of religious life within the Province by choosing to affirm or disagree with statements about community. Their responses later returned to the sisters in the form of an aggregate Province self-understanding: individual responses transformed into group perception. In this sense, the Province survey reflected the duality inherent in group process instruments: while sisters were engaged in the practical task of completing a survey on issues of future Province policy, the instrument itself became a conduit of psychic transformation. The exercise caused sisters to shift their perspective from their individual opinion to the province-wide consciousness. In the Providence survey, as Moreno had suggested, individual task became socio-result. The survey results clearly articulated a “group” conception of the consensual nature of community and religious life, and even occasionally affirmed that the Province was to some extent realizing that ideal.

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 10.

### Collegial Transformation, Part Two : Benedictine Sisters and T-Groups

At roughly the same time that the Sisters of Providence were synthesizing the results of their self-survey into community priorities, the Benedictine Sisters, Queen of Angels community, were planning a self-study that was specifically oriented toward “future planning.” The Queen of Angels community comprised roughly seventy-five sisters living and working in concert from their thirty-acre monastery in Mount Angel, Oregon. As monastic nuns, the Benedictine sisters understood religious life in terms of a commitment to their specific community, rather than to a larger order or work of mercy that apostolic sisters (such as the Sisters of Providence) shared. The nuns of Mount Angel professed a vow of stability, a lifelong commitment to a particular community where they would pursue contemplation, prayer, and service to the people of the local area. Their monastic identity tempered hierarchical elements in their authority structure. The Benedictine Sisters brought into the transformation years a primary orientation towards community which was already present in their decision processes.<sup>167</sup> Though members of this community were accustomed to view themselves as a collegial unit, this was the first time that they had used a formal, consensus-oriented process to formulate community policy. And though they grappled with modernization issues such as habit and education, they focused less on issues of authority and collegiality than their apostolic counterparts. Rather, the central issues of the Benedictine transformation process were intra-community dynamics and community direction

The small group (T-group) basis of this study structurally affirmed existing community acceptance of consensus among sisters, rather than of directives from

---

<sup>167</sup> Dieker interview.

superiors, as the foundation of authority within the community. The study also embodied the sociological distinction between instrument and expression in the T-group. Two different groups, each with a distinct function, guided the Benedictine sisters through their study. The first, a "Self Study Committee," designed the study and initiated its progression from each step to the next. The other, a "Decision Making and Collegiality Task Force," trained group facilitators and established community norms for constructive communication within the small groups. Thus, the Committee assumed responsibility for task, and the Task Force, for expression. They kept their spheres of influence and responsibility distinct, yet connected them intimately.

From August 1974 through August 1975 the Self Study Committee met to plan the study and design study materials. In one of its first activities, the committee appointed the Decision Making and Collegiality Task Force to establish a foundation for the consensual decision process the community would use throughout the study.<sup>168</sup> The Committee designed the study to follow a "team model," dividing the entire community into voluntary small groups of six to eight sisters. The study process alternated consensual process on a series of "steps" from small groups to the total community, then back to the small groups. Each group met regularly for six months to complete a progression of tasks that called upon the group to draft a future scenario for the community, compile a list of future assumptions, establish a prioritized set of future goals, and craft a prioritized set of future events to implement the goals. The Committee stated that, though each group was to develop its own method to complete the assignments, they were to produce their results through a consensual process. Upon completion of each successive assignment, all groups reported their results to the Self Study Committee, who, in turn, compiled the reports from the different groups into a comprehensive list. Then, on a "community Sunday," all members

---

<sup>168</sup> Self Study Committee, "Timeline for Self Study," 1974-76 self study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

of the community met to agree on, prioritize, and ratify a final comprehensive list. The Committee then returned that list to the small groups to use to complete the next assignment.<sup>169</sup> In the Study Timeline, the Self Study Committee stated that the ultimate goal of the study would be the resultant guidance it would provide to community leadership. "If Assumptions, Future Goals, and Future Events can be agreed upon by the Community," it explained, "there has been a basic direction indicated by consensus of the Community. This consensus gives leaders the general direction."<sup>170</sup>

Less goal oriented than the Self-Study Committee, the Decision Making and Collegiality Task Force focused on the process of the study. The Task Force's function was to provide to the community resources on consensual group process -- essentially to familiarize sisters with the dynamics and language of sensitivity training. The Task Force prepared a manual for each sister, addressing topics of communication and interpersonal dynamics. The manual included exercises on "quality and acceptance dimensions of decision" and "alternate processes of information sharing."<sup>171</sup> The Task Force also trained group leaders in facilitation skills. In a facilitation-training session, one sister recorded

Take time to discuss each one's reason for evaluating that particular facet of community life the way she did. Establish ground rules beforehand: every view is valid and worth listening to and understanding; all views will be respected despite disagreements on an issue or different ways of understanding a situation; the goal for all is to come to a better mutual understanding; the only behavior you can change is your own, etc. . . . More ground rules: to be constructive- be gentle as well as honest, "confrontation" is not always called for- "meeting" is. Remember, we have the power to bind or loose one another-- to stymie or help each other grow. To nurture growth in love is our objective.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Decision Making and Collegiality Task Force, "Self Study Manual," 1974-76 self study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Anonymous sister, handwritten notes on facilitation-training session, *ibid.*

The guidelines showed that, in addition to engaging in the creative task of forming a future vision for the community, the groups were also to focus especially on internal dynamics and interpersonal sharing.

An exercise in the manual on “cycle of trust, cycle of mistrust in community” mirrored T-group theory models of positive and negative interpersonal dynamics. The exercise envisioned two hypothetical processes of communication, one based on trust and the other based on mistrust, and followed them through their effects upon individual communication and community dynamics. It argued that trust-based communication would instill honesty and openness in community members, and, within the community as a whole, encourage “unity and healing” that would further increase trust. In a cycle of mistrust, the exercise warned, communication would be marked by dishonesty and secrecy. The community would experience “disunity and division,” which would give rise to further mistrust among community members. In the margins of her manual, next to this exercise, one sister noted:

Rationale: Reality communication, information-sharing, self-sharing generates trust in the interpersonal realm, too. In order to trust, we need to understand why the other feels the way she does & accept the fact that she feels that way. This can be a constructive way of addressing & dealing with “divisions” in a community. <sup>173</sup>

The Task Force was presenting a theory and procedure already familiar in group-process literature. Richard E. Walton had described a similar cycle in his article on communication in a T-group, “How to Choose Between Strategies of Conflict and Collaboration.” Walton contrasted “two familiar, but opposite modes of behavior,”

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

designated “A” and “B.”<sup>174</sup> Under “Approach A” Walton enumerated several facets of a “distributive social situation”:

1. Behavior is purposeful in pursuing own goals.
2. *Secrecy*
3. Accurate personal understanding of own needs, but publicly disguised or misrepresented-- don't let them know what you really want most so that they won't know how much you are willing to give up to get it.
4. Unpredictable, mixed strategies, utilizing the element of surprise.
5. Threats and Bluffs.<sup>175</sup>

“Approach B” described an “integrative social situation:”

1. Behavior is purposeful in pursuing *goals held in common*.
2. *Openness*
3. Accurate personal understanding of own needs; accurate representation of them.
4. Predictable; while flexible behavior is appropriate, it is not designed to take another party by surprise.
5. Threats or bluffs are not used.<sup>176</sup>

Walton also noted that, “mutual relationships of confidence and concern are essential to the very personal kind of T-group learning.”<sup>177</sup> Walton’s article and the sister’s notes agree that individual acceptance and understanding of various perspectives within the community was essential to building trust among community members.

Through the study process, the Benedictine sisters achieved consensus on, and adopted, five broad goals that were to guide future planning for the community. Three of their goals related to the focus and content of daily community life and intra-community dynamics: 1) “to make a serious effort to return to a simpler, more balanced life style of work and prayer, so that our ministry to others may be truly more apostolic and prayerful”; 2) “to raise awareness among the Sisters, and to implement structures which encourage and

---

<sup>174</sup> Richard E. Walton, “How to Choose Between Strategies of Conflict and Collaboration” in Golembiewski, ed., Sensitivity Training and the Laboratory Approach, 336.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added by author.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added by author.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

support more accountability of each Sister to each Sister and to the total community, in order to better reflect the religious value of community"; and 3) "to reflect in our daily life and ministry prayer as a primary value." Separate self-study groups presented several recommendations to help the community achieve these goals. Group V suggested that the community deliberate on "some kind of structuring, to aid in personal responsibility and accountability," so each sister might feel that she would have received, "some ideal against which I can measure myself and my actions."<sup>178</sup> Another group requested further encouragement for practices of directness, honesty, and openness in communication among sisters.<sup>179</sup>

The remaining two goals centered on community's direction and corporate decision process. The fourth goal emphasized community reflection "to clarify our thinking and planning about the use of our present/future buildings." The last goal reflected sisters' desire to become more comfortable with the newer forms of decision-making and obedience they were practicing. The sisters stated the goal "to determine the process by which decisions are made and to grow in the use of discernment and collegiality."<sup>180</sup> To achieve that goal, group VIII recommended that the sisters restructure their committee system of governance, to give the committees more responsibility. They agreed with the consensus goal that the community should establish a clearer policy about decision-making.<sup>181</sup> One study group proposed a decision process in which individual discernment

---

<sup>178</sup> Summary of self study manual contents of group V, 1975-76 self study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

<sup>179</sup> Summary of self study manual contents of group VIII, 1975-76 self study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

<sup>180</sup> Self study goals summary, 1975-76 self study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

<sup>181</sup> Summary of self study manual contents of group VII, 1975-76 self-study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

would play a central role. They wrote that “the reflection and prayerful discerning of the sister in dialogue with a Superior who reflects and prayerfully discerns, creates an attitude of obedience to the Will of God in all ones [sic] choices.” Linking individual to community processes of decision making, they explained, “Just as this [discernment] applies to the individual in relationship to the leader, so does it apply to the group seeking consensus, and a leadership which guides a collegial body.”<sup>182</sup> Whatever form of decision process the different self-study groups favored, in their responses they concurred in a unanimous belief that authority properly rested with the individual and the community, rather than the Church hierarchy. They reinforced that conviction in their desire to increase qualities of discernment and collegiality in community decision making.

In their self-study process the Benedictine sisters embodied several components which had become familiar in social scientists’ development of T-groups. In their conscious design to include every sister in a small group, they reflected T-group assumptions that communities, as well as individual sisters, were dynamic entities, perpetually engaged in a process of growth and change. The organization of sister groups into small units, which remained constant throughout the process with one designated facilitator, reflected T-group norms. Study planners believed that the intimate size and constancy of the groups would encourage self-revelation and establish trust bonds between group members. Group assignments, such as an assignment to write a future scenario for the community, called upon members to address individual fears and hopes within the group context. The freedom of each group to determine its own method to complete the assigned tasks recognized that each group was a unique entity. The freedom affirmed that a group’s instrumental operation would be a function of its internal composition, which would include such variables as the personalities and preferences of individual group

---

<sup>182</sup> Summary of self study manual contents of group V, 1975-76 self study file, Archives of the Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

members, as well as the unique interpersonal dynamics that would result from this combination of human factors. Finally, the participatory element of the small group was intended to empower sisters with a personal investment in the outcome of the study.

### Transformed Authority and Self-Studies

The Sisters of Providence and Benedictine Sister self-studies provide two levels of insight into the collegial stage of the transformation of women religious in the United States. On one hand, the democratic structure of the studies evidenced the dramatic shift in sisters' understanding of authority that had grown out of their experience with democratic group and chapter meetings in the years following Vatican II. Studies also reflected that sisters had incorporated sociological critiques of hierarchical authority into their renewal process. In the studies, sisters acted under the assumption that power to shape community life rested in the women of the community, rather than in the dictates of an inherited power structure. The self-study formats reflected this shift from a reform implemented through hierarchical institutions to a change pursued by peers within a collegial exchange of ideas. The study designers invited, and expected, all sisters of the respective community or province to participate in the study process. The communities considered the results of the studies to be authoritative for determining their decisions about renewal of religious life. The Benedictines specifically and consciously organized their study to achieve community-wide consensus on major goals. Sisters' emerging egalitarian view of religious authority, especially as it related to issues of modernization, were manifested in the studies.

Conversely, the content of the studies is rich terrain for reflection on the power of collegial decision process. Before 1965 the superiors of the Sisters of Providence exhibited extreme (and perhaps excessive) caution in implementing changes to their habit, and in more than six years they made little progress towards this goal. However, within

one year after they adopted the community meeting format, sisters in the order were wearing their modified habits. In both studies, sisters expressed, in their statements about the nature of authority, the extent to which community participation had rapidly and completely transformed the women's understanding of power. This, in turn, empowered them to transform their community life. The momentum and scope of transformation increased exponentially when the whole community of women religious began to participate in decisions of renewal. Through the collegial self-study format, the sisters altered their community structure, specific facets of their daily life, and their community decision processes. They reinterpreted inherited concepts of community, vocation, and obedience, and the meaning of their religious vows according to their own understanding of religious life. The specific differences between the life of "Jane Johnson" in 1950 and that of "Sally Smith" thirty years later, as religious women, resulted largely from this collegial decision process that came to life in the years after the Second Vatican Council.

## CHAPTER IV

### “FOR THE RENEWAL OF POWER STRUCTURES”

#### The Authority Conflict and its Context

The central conflict in the renewal of American women's institutes was between opposing understandings of the nature of religious obedience and the character and locus of religious authority. Once the question of authority was decided-- who should make decisions, and in what manner -- the other contentious issues surrounding religious renewal-- distinctive dress, institutional structure, the norms of daily life, the meaning of the vows, etc. -- would fall into place. Either the congregational superior would dictate these policies, or the sisters would decide such matters for themselves through democratic or consensual processes. In part, this conflict can be attributed to the peculiar American context in which the documents were interpreted: a context which joined a longstanding cultural tradition of democratic rhetoric with a specific historical moment of heightened criticism of hierarchical authority in academic institutions and society at large. Given this context, it is not surprising that the authority structures of the hierarchical church were called into question by certain members of the institution. It is also logical that, in the wake of Vatican II, women religious, particularly those who were already transforming their institutes, initiated a radical break with traditional forms of governance. But, what precipitated the conflict between those who rejected and those who defended traditional, hierarchical authority? How did two groups within the same church arrive at such widely divergent conclusions? On what foundation did each group base its arguments against the

position of the other?

The conflict over forms of governance among American women religious grew out of a larger conflict in the Catholic church in the United States: a conflict within the American Church between divergent interpretations of the intent of the Second Vatican Council. In the conflict over forms of governance in women's congregations, both sides believed they were following the Council's call for renewal and adaptation to the modern world. Both sides used Conciliar documents to support their positions. They asked similar questions of the Council, but arrived at markedly different answers. In its stress on the sacredness manifest in "the People of God," did the Council intend to dismantle the hierarchy in favor of participatory and egalitarian governance of the church? In its call for religious life to adapt to the modern world, did the Second Vatican Council allow or even encourage the application of social-science ideas, the tools of the modern world, to the previously separate world of religious?

Sisters who chose collegial models of collective decision making, with concomitant ideas of cooperative authority and obedience to individual conscience, saw these forms of governance as the forms naturally suited to the Vatican II concept of the Church as "the People of God." Indeed, they believed that in constitutionally affirming participatory forms of governance in their congregations, they were reflecting a principle of theological democracy in the Second Vatican Council. As they understood it, the Council allowed them to apply scientific ideas as tools to both diagnose and heal problems within traditional forms of religious life. They believed that ideas offered by secular sciences were appropriate, perhaps necessary, tools to fulfill the mandate for renewal.

In the same manner, sisters and Vatican authorities who opposed their congregation's abandonment of traditional forms of authority and obedience argued that such changes departed from the true intention of the Council, which was to alter the relationship of the church to the world, *not* to alter the church itself. Thus, members of the

Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, the group of sisters who urged their congregations to retain traditional forms of religious life, named themselves after the Vatican II document on the renewal of religious life. They perceived themselves as defenders of authentic renewal as initiated by the Council. The Consortium held that the Vatican Council had affirmed the role of the major superior, traditional authority, and mandatory obedience. These sisters argued, also, that sociological influence on renewal decisions injected a form of secularism into Conciliar renewal of the Church which should have been mystical and sacred.

Thus, the conflicts that emerged within the transformation of American women religious stemmed, to some extent, from divergent interpretations of "authoritative," yet essentially ambiguous, documents from the Second Vatican Council. The latent tensions within those documents were ignited by the peculiarities of the context of American women religious into which they were dropped. The ambiguity of Vatican II documents is evident in the different clarifications that successive Popes and the Sacred Congregation issued to interpret them and settle disputes over the meaning of the Council. On June 29, 1971, Pope Paul VI issued *Evangelica Testificatio*, his "Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life According to the Teachings of the Second Vatican Council." In 1983 the church revised the entire code of canon law to reflect the changes of Vatican II, including those sections which applied to religious institutes.<sup>183</sup> On April 3 of that year, Pope John Paul II issued a letter to the bishops of the United States in which he directed them to guide American congregations in their continuing renewal efforts. And on May 31 of that same year the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes issued a statement which

---

<sup>183</sup> Codes applying to institutes of vowed religious and their relationship to the larger structure of the church appear in Book II, Part II, "The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church," and Part III, "Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life." The Code of Canon Law, in English Translation (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983).

detailed the “Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to the Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate.”

Those documents were as much a reaction to developments in the American church as they were proactive statements of theology. In *Evangelica Testificatio* Pope Paul VI acknowledged that in his exhortation:

we wish to respond to the anxiety, uncertainty and instability shown by some; at the same time we wish to encourage those who are seeking the true renewal of the religious life. The boldness of certain arbitrary transformations, an exaggerated mistrust of the past . . . and a mentality excessively preoccupied with hastily conforming to the profound changes which disturb our times have succeeded in leading some to consider as outmoded the specific forms of religious life. Has not appeal even unjustly been made to the Council to cast doubt on the very principle of religious life?<sup>184</sup>

In his 1983 letter to American bishops, John Paul II also referred to problematic facets of the American church:

The essential elements are lived in different ways from one Institute to another. You yourselves deal with this rich variety in the context of the American reality. Nevertheless, there are elements which are common to all forms of religious life and which the Church regards as essential. . . . In those cases, too where individuals or groups, for whatever reason, have departed from the indispensable norms of religious life, or have even, to the scandal of the faithful, adopted positions at variance with the Church’s teaching, I ask you my brother Bishops . . . to proclaim once again the Church’s universal call to conversion, spiritual renewal and holiness.<sup>185</sup>

The declaration of “Essential Elements” from SCRSI came at a particularly auspicious moment. As SCRSI, at the time, was in the contentious process of examining revised constitutions of religious institutes, its statement detailed those “essential elements” that would render constitutions acceptable for canonical status and approval. In the introduction of its document, SCRSI stated its purpose “to present a clear statement of the Church’s

---

<sup>184</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teachings of the Second Vatican Council* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1971), 1-2.

<sup>185</sup> John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of the United States, April 3, 1983* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1983), 6-8.

teaching regarding religious life at a moment which is particularly significant and opportune.”<sup>186</sup> Thus, “Essential Elements” seems to be a refutation of those elements SCRSI had found to be unacceptable in the constitutions it had revised for approval, or had rejected outright. Each of the clarifications suggested that Roman authorities objected to two developments among religious in the American church: their rejection of hierarchy in governance, and their application of social science expertise to the renewal of religious life. Notably, *all* the clarifications specifically and consciously affirmed the principle of hierarchy in governance, and identified vowed obedience to the hierarchy as a central tenant of religious life. All but the revised code of canon law directly criticized the influence of the social and behavioral sciences on renewal decisions.

#### Hierarchy Rejected

In 1966, Lillanna (then Sr. Mary Audrey) Kopp was violating both facets of Vatican clarification in her research, writing, and lectures to other women religious. Her work, and that of fellow sister and fellow sociologist Marie Augusta Neal, clearly stated precisely those principles that Popes would later refute in their pronouncements about renewal of religious institutes. Kopp and Neal applied sociological theory to the structures of women’s institutes, concluding that because hierarchical authority had a clearly negative effect on women’s congregations it must be replaced by norms of participatory decision process. In 1966 Kopp published an article, “Anomie and Renewal: A Sociological Analysis,” in the Sister Formation Bulletin. In it she argued that sisters were experiencing negative psychological effects from tensions between their transition efforts and the rigidity

---

<sup>186</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1983), 15.

of traditional patterns. Kopp began her argument by assuring her sister readers that her sociological critique of religious life was in keeping with the intent of the recently ended Second Vatican Council:

Vatican II has urged religious communities to put the spotlight of analysis on themselves, and to apply the research finds of sociology, psychology and theology to their own specific structures, functions and dysfunctions. Sociology has some unique contributions to make to this pool of common knowledge. Its research insights, and their applications to religious organizations, can contribute to the common good of the entire body of American sisterhoods in their planning sessions for renewal and renovation.<sup>187</sup>

In this passage Kopp introduced several of the fundamental assumptions about renewal and religious life which she reiterated in many of her works. First, she interpreted the Vatican Council to encourage scientific inquiry to advance *aggiornamento*. In a later passage she quoted *Perfectae Caritatis* in support of this position: "Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church."<sup>188</sup> In her book The New Nuns Kopp strengthened this point by stating that "Vatican II *recommends* that we recognize that God also manifests His will for man through the SCIENTIFIC MODE OF REVELATION--through man's discovery of the social laws of his nature."<sup>189</sup> Second, Kopp placed sociology and psychology alongside theology, thereby implying an essential harmony between disciplines that examined human nature and those that focused on the nature of God. Thus, in The New Nuns she enumerated five bases for the renewal of authority structures in the church: "(1) arguments from REASON, (2) RESEARCH finds of the

---

<sup>187</sup> Sr. Mary Audrey Kopp, SNJM, "Anomie and Renewal: A Sociological Analysis," Sister Formation Bulletin (Fall 1966): 17.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 19. Kopp footnotes this passage as "Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Adaption and Renewal of Religious Life, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, English Translation in the National Catholic Reporter, December 1, 1965, p. 10, 2, d."

<sup>189</sup> Kopp, New Nuns, 19. Italicized emphasis added by author.

behavioral sciences, (3) Scriptural studies of the NEW TESTAMENT MODEL OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, (4) recommendations of VATICAN II, and (5) discussion by CHARISMATIC CATALYSTS representing every aspect of community renewal."<sup>190</sup>

Third, Kopp stated that sociology was an especially valuable tool for renewal, one that offered unique insights into the effects of different structures in religious institutes. While Kopp stated this perspective positively, writing that "By studying bureaucracy sisters are assisted to a position from which they can take an objective look at what has come to pass in structural change in the convent over the past decade of rapid formalization."<sup>191</sup> Marie Augusta Neal asserted a negative version of the same argument when she asked:

Does the institutional Church formally deceive itself if it claims that the insights of social science do not apply to Church structures in the same way they apply to other organizations because hierarchy has a special charism or grace in the Church?<sup>192</sup>

For Kopp and Neal, sociology offered theories to identify and diagnose dysfunctional elements of religious structures, but it also provided tools to remedy defects of women's institutes. Kopp refuted suggestions that the problems of religious life resulted from spiritual weakening among members. Rather, Kopp argued that, according to sociology, such problems indicated "inbuilt dysfunctions" in the authority patterns of the church, and concluded that "these dysfunctional elements in religious structures can be modified by the application of sociological insights."<sup>193</sup> Using sociologists Ralph K. White's and Ronald Lippit's Autocracy and Democracy: An Experimental Inquiry, Peter Blau's, The Dynamics of Bureaucracy, Bernard Berelson's and Gary Steiner's Human

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>191</sup> Kopp, "Anomie and Renewal," 19.

<sup>192</sup> Neal, 91.

<sup>193</sup> Kopp, "Anomie and Renewal," 17.

Behavior, Kopp identified two structural flaws in the church which adversely affected women's institutes: authoritarianism and bureaucracy.

Kopp forcefully argued that the church, including its religious congregations, was operating according to harmful patterns of hierarchical authority. She wrote at length that:

One of the richest mines of sociological insight, developed through several decades of research, is in the arena of the impact of DEMOCRATIC, AUTOCRATIC, and LAISSEZ FAIRE patterns of authority in persons and groups. There is ample empirical evidence from these studies that a person's interior disposition towards authority is influenced by its specific pattern of operation, and that the dysfunctional effects of autocracy and laissez faire are numerous. It will be a significant aggiornamento step when the research on the democratic process is made available to all personnel in religious communities, for the out-moded cultural patterns of authority will be recognized for what they are: injurious to both parties-- the one in power and the one seeking to obey.<sup>194</sup>

Conversely, the obedience of religious subjects to religious superiors was equally damaging to their human nature:

Today men are recognizing more the SOCIAL NATURE OF MAN, the need for men to act as SOCIAL AGENTS IN CONCERT WITH OTHER SOCIAL AGENTS. Hence, men are recognizing that it is contrary to their social nature to act on the fallible and solitary dictum of one man, or even of a council of a few, in action contrary to the reasoning of the members of a social body.<sup>195</sup>

She then turned her attention from the scientific to the religious sphere, and argued that, in addition to transgressing sociological understanding of healthy human interaction, hierarchy also violated the will of God, as revealed in the person of Christ. While hierarchy was harmful in all contexts of corporate human endeavor, it was particularly inappropriate for communities seeking to imitate Christ-ordained forms of Christian community. For Kopp, the patterns of hierarchical authority entrenched in convents were heretical.<sup>196</sup>

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>196</sup> Kopp, New Nuns, 33.

Kopp also criticized bureaucratic elements in traditional and even renewed structures. She concurred with Goffman's characterization of total institutions, including religious communities, as elaborate forms of self-perpetuating bureaucracy, where the bureaucracy structured all facets of the daily life of inmates according to its need for efficiency and control. Bureaucracy was the institutional manifestation of hierarchical authority. She argued that even those bureaucratic elements sisters accepted in order to increase their efficiency in service roles were ultimately destructive to authentic religious life:

Bureaucrats are specialists who either chose to or inadvertently sacrificed some human warmth and humane patterns on the altar of efficiency. In the case of most religious groups, one cannot but admire the goals of parochial education or care of the poor sick which influenced the adoption of bureaucratic means, adoption of bureaucratic structure for apostolic efficiency. They could not know that this same structure might eventually paralyze spiritual growth in members, and be non-adaptive in responding to the changing needs of the apostolate.<sup>197</sup>

Sociology, Kopp promised, offered solutions to the problem of embedded hierarchy in religious institutes. Returning to authority model studies, she asserted that egalitarian decision process which included all members of a religious institute should replace the outdated model of sister obedience to superiors. Kopp wrote: "Sociology has a pool of research data from experimentation and social analysis which empirically confirms the hypothesis from reason that the PROPER END of a human community is most rightly forwarded by democratic and collegial processes, as opposed to autocratic and laissez faire ones."<sup>198</sup> Kopp advocated consensus -- community dialogue toward agreement on shared decisions -- as the sociologically optimal form of collegial process. Her theories also advocated for the personalization of women's institutes, and a continued recognition of the inviolable uniqueness of each sister, a concept that had initially entered the world of

---

<sup>197</sup> Kopp, "Anomie and Renewal," 19.

<sup>198</sup> Kopp, New Nuns, 51.

religious women through the concept of “sister formation.” She believed that “reason rests on the conclusion that ALL persons in a community of adults have both the right and the responsibility to dialogue toward consensus.”<sup>199</sup>

Kopp argued that these sociologically determined models were compatible with the models that Christ had ordained for religious community. She asserted that, according to scripture, the role of persons in authority was one of service to the whole, and that this model reflected “the *sui generis* nature of the authority role specified throughout the New Testament for the Christian community.”<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, Kopp argued that consensual community would emerge as a natural result of the direction for renewal given by the Vatican Council, which had directed sisters to be led by the spirit of the founders of their respective institutes. Though most congregations interpreted this to mean the actual person who had founded their own order, Kopp applied it to the divine author of human community:

Vatican II recommends that the RENEWAL BLUEPRINT OF SISTERHOODS conforms to the very structure designed by our FOUNDER, THE BUILDER, THE DIVINE ARCHITECT OF COMMUNITY. His design may be symbolized by a CIRCLE OF UNITY as opposed to the SPLIT-LEVEL POWER PYRAMID, the latter being the very form Christ took time to warn us against in frequent Scriptural discourse.<sup>201</sup>

#### Hierarchy Mandated

When Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, and the Sacred Congregation, issued clarifications of Council mandates for renewal, to guide communities through the *aggiornamento* process, they needed to counter ideas such as Kopp’s and Neal’s that had

---

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 53

become common among American women's institutes. The Popes were clear and unyielding in affirming that hierarchy was a central component of divinely ordained church structure. They also adamantly rejected the relevance of the social and behavioral sciences to religious life. The Sacred Congregation, too, made hierarchy one of the "essential elements" for canonical status of religious institutes. All of these clarifying documents defended their arguments with religious principles.

At points in the documents, the authors asserted hierarchy in its own defense (i.e.: "hierarchy exists because the hierarchy wishes it so"). More often, the authors provided religious justifications for the place of hierarchy within the Church. They based their argument upon an assertion that the authority hierarchy of the church reflected the spiritual hierarchy of the universe, of which God was the apex. In "Essential Elements," the Sacred Congregation wrote that "men and women are members of religious institutes whose structures reflect the Christian hierarchy of which the head is Christ himself."<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, the hierarchy of the church, and of individual religious institutes, symbolized appropriate human submission to God's authority. The governance of religious congregations must remain essentially hierarchical, for religious authority filtered down the cosmic hierarchy from God through superiors to the individual religious. SCRSI wrote in detail that religious

have chosen to live vowed obedience as a value in life. They therefore require a form of government that expresses these values and a particular form of religious authority. Such authority, which is particular to religious institutes, does not derive from the members themselves. It is conferred by the Church at the time of establishing each institute and by the approving of its constitutions. It is an authority invested in superiors for the duration of their service . . . always preserving the superior's final right of discerning and deciding what is to be done.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, 42.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

The Congregation continued, in a direct confrontation with institutes that had implemented collegial authority in their constitutions, that: "Strictly speaking, this religious authority is not shared."<sup>204</sup> Moreover, the documents argued that in the act of submission to religious authority, the individual religious had to imitate the sacrifice of Christ, and his submission to the will of God in crucifixion. Paul VI stated this principle as follows: "The Lord obliges each one to 'lose his life' if he is to follow him. You will observe this precept by accepting the directives of your superiors as a guarantee of your religious profession, through which you offer to God a total dedication of your wills as a sacrifice of yourselves."<sup>205</sup> In another passage he stated: "while accepting the directives, the religious follow our Master's example and cooperate in the work of salvation."<sup>206</sup>

The clarification documents further argued that, although religious congregations had to adapt external facets to the circumstances of the modern world, the spiritual purpose and sacramental nature of religious life rendered its core principles eternal and independent of the whims of temporal change. SCRSI explained that the purpose of "Essential Elements" was to elucidate those constant elements of religious life that were not open to revision by religious institutes in their renewal efforts:

Historical and cultural changes bring about evolution in the lived reality, but the forms and direction that the evolution takes are determined by the essential elements without which religious life loses its identity. In the present text addressed to institutes dedicated to apostolic works, this Sacred Congregation confines itself to a clarification and restatement of these essential elements.<sup>207</sup>

Those essential elements included many provisions that, by 1983, had already been revised in American women's communities through collegial forms of decision process: distinctive

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Paul VI, 10.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>207</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, 16.

dress, regularized devotional life of a congregation, community proximity in living accommodations, and hierarchical authority. Paul VI stated this principle in more gentle terms of encouragement to congregations:

For a living being, adaption to its surroundings does not consist in abandoning its true identity, but rather in asserting itself in the vitality that is its own. Deep understanding of present tendencies and of the needs of the modern world should cause your own source of energy to spring up with renewed vigor and freshness. It is a sublime task in the measure that it is a difficult one.<sup>208</sup>

The documents strongly argued that the revelation, tradition, and mystery of the divine should not and cannot be explained by, justified by, nor criticized by the social or behavioral sciences. According to traditional Catholic theology, as affirmed by Vatican II, vowed religious occupied a unique place within the spiritual cosmos. The religious life of vowed self-abnegation had spiritual value for the entire Church: religious manifested a unique form of divine grace, as a matter of divine mystery. Thus, the spiritual role of religious could not be understood according to scientific principles. SCRSI directly attacked the use of sociological principles by renewing congregations, stating “she [the church] is both subject and object of faith essentially transcending the parameters of any purely sociological perspective even while she renews her human structures in light of historical evolutions and cultural changes.”<sup>209</sup> The elements of religious discipline that were objectionable to psychologists and sociologists, or impractical according to modern thought-- individual poverty lived in the large cloister, regimented devotional life, distinctive habits, restriction of contact with the secular world, strict vowed obedience to authority-- were justifiable in view of the unique spiritual role of religious in the world. Indeed, these “essential elements” were physical evidence of the redemptive “otherness” of religious within the sinful world.

---

<sup>208</sup> Paul VI, 17.

<sup>209</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, 36.

Thus two perspectives emerged within the transformation of American women religious. One, most clearly articulated by sister sociologists Lillanna Kopp and Marie Augusta Neal, affirmed the complementarity of truths revealed through a tradition of faith with those discovered through scientific study. The other, asserted by Holy Fathers and the Sacred Congregation, understood religious life to be a form of divine mystery, a manifestation of divine grace that, as such, could not be measured, much less understood by a science confined to the world of human interactions. The former used sociological criteria to determine that hierarchical authority was inconsistent with God's desire for religious to be whole and autonomous in their consecrated states of perfection. Obedience was a sister in intimate conversation with God, true to her deepest nature in her response to God's directing her as a beloved partner in earthly works of grace. The latter drew upon theological tradition to confirm that hierarchy was a visible manifestation of the spiritual hierarchy of states of perfection among God's people, and a symbol of God's loving omnipotence over the church. Obedience was the sister who embodied Christ's nature of self-sacrifice in her humble service, in her freely chosen submission to the divine will expressed in her superior.

On the surface these are different perspectives of authority and obedience, but the implication of the conflict lies much deeper. Embedded in these two positions are competing answers to questions which lie at the heart of individual religious faith, questions that are stones of foundation for corporate expressions of religious faith. Is God's essence one of intimacy or omnipotence? What is the relationship of spiritual tradition to scientific discovery? Which is a truer reflection of God's will for the human family: self-actualization or self-sacrifice? That these visions of the divine are irreconcilable seems obvious. That they are forced to coexist in uneasy tension within the American Catholic church is contemporary circumstance. It remains to be seen whether and how the church in future years will cope with the marriage of "irreconcilable differences" within its

body. The combatants are equally matched in the earnestness of their respective beliefs. One position holds a trump card in its continued power through hierarchical authority, and its legal ownership of the physical and cultural property of the church as institution. The other possesses a fierce determination not to be forced out of the church as community which it claims as home and rightful inheritance.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

As they transformed their orders' governance and discipline women religious in the United States were writing a story of changing ideas about authority and its foundation. Prior to the transformation, women religious perceived themselves as subject to the absolute authority of the Church hierarchy. The authority that priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes wielded over women religious was supported by both a theology of male spiritual superiority, and a hierarchical structure to which women, as women, were perpetual outsiders. Moreover, the authority structure of the traditional Church used its power over women to define women religious through enforcing restrictive norms of dress, behavior, and vocation that kept them isolated from the lay world, and, at times, from each other. Within their orders and communities, sisters internalized this hierarchical model of authority, and patterned intraorder relationships after it. Orders trained young sisters for religious life in this setting by teaching them to relinquish their personal power to that of religious authority, and sublimate their distinct personalities to the archetype of the "good sister."

During the first stage of the transformation, Pope Pius XII initiated specific reforms in the religious life for women in vowed communities. In the United States, sisters responded to the papal mandates with acts of obedience: they created the Sister Formation Conference and the Conference of Major Superiors of Women. Thus, women religious responded to the hierarchical authority to which they were accustomed with the familiar pattern of further hierarchy. And yet, the hierarchical institutions of the SFC and CMSW

contained within themselves the seeds of their own obsolescence. The brief lifespan of Providence Heights College of Sister Formation illustrated the paradoxical character of these institutions, for behind its cloistral walls and traditional structures sisters experienced profound change. In addition to the educational excellence that Pius had requested, the sisters of Providence Heights gained experience in cooperative work, open dialogue, and self-determination. Through "sister formation" women religious altered postulant education from a system that sought to level sisters' differences to one that respected and even encouraged young women's individuation. In this stage of the transformation sisters gained personal skills and resources that enabled them to define themselves as religious. In so doing, they implicitly rejected the authority of the Church hierarchy to define a woman's experience of religious life for her.

The Second Vatican Council accelerated the process of reform of religious life, and precipitated the second, collegial stage of the transformation of women religious. After Vatican II, women religious used the power of self-definition that they had gained through the SFC and CMSW, and the tools they had learned from the social and behavioral sciences, as bases to redefine community, rules, and obedience. Women religious went beyond the Council's call for community dialogue on modernization to implement democratic processes of community decision making, such as self-studies. They challenged the authority of religious hierarchy over community life. They replaced hierarchical authority with egalitarian collegiality, and chose to radically alter traditional forms of religious life. In doing so they opened themselves to criticism that they had rejected religious ideals of obedience and self-sacrifice in favor of secular ideals of self-actualization.

In a second, more subtle, shift in their conceptions of authority, to a significant extent, women religious replaced religious authority with the authority of scientific and management expertise. Even as sisters used sociological theories and tools to dismantle

the hierarchical authority to which they had once deferred with unquestioned obedience, they exhibited new deference to the interpretive models and study instruments of the social-sciences. The Vatican had also initiated this change in direction-- a change that women religious eventually used against the power of Rome. During the hierarchical stage of transformation, the Pontiff mandated that sisters become experts in their vocational charisms. Sister institutions and conferences trained leaders to be experts in the management and care of women who were their subjects. Sisters designed the Everett Curriculum to give young sisters the expertise they would later exercise in works of mercy. Sisters Lillanna Kopp and Marie Augusta Neal, as professed sociologists, applied their academic expertise to renewal, and infused sociological interpretations of religious life deep into the renewal process. Sisters utilized the results of surveys and self-studies to formulate renewal decisions. They considered the results of their self-studies authoritative sources to inform renewal direction. Sisters also looked outside of the religious world, to management consultants and structural analysts, for additional guidance.

The effects of sisters' shift toward the authority of expertise were equally subtle. They unquestionably influenced sister transition from hierarchical to egalitarian decision processes. Sociology provided sisters with an interpretive framework that linked their feelings of powerlessness and marginalization to bureaucratic structures of the church. Using that framework, sisters freed themselves from the overtly coercive religious structures. Sociological models also provided sisters with a common cultural language with which to explain their decisions to each other, to the Catholic laity, and to the American public. But this expertise also infused the transformation process with rigid democratic and therapeutic values that had been previously unknown in religious life. Sisters who objected to these were, in extreme cases, pathologized and their criticisms dismissed as irrelevant and regressive. In these cases, dissent was interpreted as antisocial and unsisterly behavior. Moreover, scientific and management expertise exerted a subtle

pressure for continued conformity among women religious, albeit a conformity to new models of consensus and professionalism. Expertise proved a useful, but unreliable ally in sisters' conflicts with those who advocated traditional forms of religious life. In the immediate wake of Vatican II, expertise was effective ammunition against Vatican attacks on specific, congregational choices, and on the general direction of renewal among American congregations. But sisters' reliance upon the secular expertise of social scientists and organizational planners left them vulnerable to religious criticism that their renewal was "this-worldly" in orientation. Thus, when it reasserted the authority of the religious hierarchy, the Vatican simultaneously denied the validity of the social-scientific expertise for the religious world. In some cases, it dismissed entirely sisters' right to self-determination in their *aggiornamento*.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Archival Sources

Benedictine Sisters, self-study file, 1974-1976, D, archives of Benedictine Sisters, Mount Angel, Oregon.

National Assembly of Religious Women, Chicago, Illinois, statement of protest on behalf of women religious against the Vatican, August 14, 1983, TD, archives of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Marylhurst, Oregon.

National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, (NCCIJ) Papers, 1961-69, Marquette University Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

National Coalition of American Nuns, (NCAN) papers, 1969-1984, Marquette University Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Sisters of Providence, documentation of the Providence Heights College of Sister Formation, 1966-1969, archives of Sisters of Providence, Seattle, Washington.

Sisters of Providence, documentation of the Sister Formation Conference, 1952-1972, archives of Sisters of Providence, Seattle, Washington.

#### Interviews

Abhold, Sr. Cecelia (Sr. Mary Loretta), SP. Interview by author, 7 April 1995, Seattle, Washington. Tape recording in the author's possession.

Dieker, Sr. Alberta, OSB. Interview by author, 7 March 1995, Mount Angel, Oregon. Tape recording in the author's possession.

Jackson, Sr. Janice, SNJM. Interviews by author, 22 February 1995, 16 March, 30 August 1995 and 8 April 1996, Eugene, Oregon. Tape recording in the author's possession.

Kasper, Sr. Rosemarie, SNJM. Interview by author, 21 February 1995, Marylhurst, Oregon. Written notes in the author's possession.

Kopp, Lillanna. (Sr. Mary Audrey, SNJM). Interview by author, 16 March, 1996, Portland, Oregon. Tape recording in the author's possession.

Ryan, Sr. Janet, SNJM. Interview by author, 7 February 1995, Eugene, Oregon. Written notes in the author's possession.

Traxler, Sr. Margaret (Mary Peter), SSND. Interview by author, 17 August 1996, Chicago, Illinois. Tape recording in the author's possession.

### Printed Sources

#### Books

Abbott, Walter, SJ., ed. The Documents of Vatican II. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.

Bales, Robert F. Personality and Interpersonal Behavior. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1970.

Bales, Robert F., and Stephen D. Cohen. SYMLOG: A System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups. New York: Free Press, 1979.

Bell, Daniel. "Notes on Authoritarian and Democratic Leadership." In Studies in Leadership: Leadership and Democratic Action, ed. Alvin Gouldner, 395-408. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950.

Benestad, Brian J. The Pursuit of a Just Social Order: Policy Statements of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1966-1980. Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982.

Bernstein, Saul, ed. Explorations in Group Work: Essays in Theory and Practice. Boston: Milford House, 1973.

Bonner, Hubert. Group Dynamics: Principles and Applications. New York: Ronald Press, 1959.

Borromeo, Sr. M. Charles, CSC., ed. The Changing Sister. Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1965.

\_\_\_\_\_. The New Nuns. New York: New American Library, 1967.

- Bradley, Sr. Ritamary, ed. The Mind of the Church in the Formation of Sisters: Selections from the Addresses Given during the Six Regional Conferences and the First National Meeting of the Sister Formation Conference, 1954-1955. New York: Fordham University Press, 1956
- \_\_\_\_\_. Planning for the Formation of Sisters: Studies on Teaching Apostolate and Selections from Addresses of the sister Formation Conferences, 1956-1957. New York: Fordham University Press, 1958.
- Chittister, Joan. "Religious Orders: Religious Life Is Still Alive, but Far from the Promised Land." National Catholic Reporter. Supplement (February 18, 1994), 1.
- Consortium Perfectae Caritatis. "Widening the Dialogue . . .": Response by the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis to Widening the Dialogue: Reflection on Evangelica Testificatio by Leadership Conference of Women Religious indicated by the S.C.R.S.I. to mean Conference of Leaders of Religious Women in the U.S. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975.
- Daughters of St. Paul. Religious Life in the Light of Vatican II. St. Paul, MN: St. Paul's Editions, 1967.
- Goffman, Erving. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1962.
- Gouran, Dennis. Making Decisions: Choices and Consequences. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982.
- Grollmes, Eugene E., SJ, ed. Vows but no Walls: An Analysis of Religious Life. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1967.
- Haley, Joseph E., C.S.C., ed. Proceedings of the 1957 Sisters' Institute of Spirituality. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Proceedings of the 1959 Sisters' Institute of Spirituality: The Superior and the Personality Development of the Subject-Religious. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960.
- Hare, A. Paul, et al, eds. Small Groups: Studies in Social Interactions. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.
- Hassenger, Robert. "Conflict in Catholic Colleges." In Seasons of Rebellion: Protest and Radicalism in Recent America. New York: Holt, Reinhart, Winston, 1972.
- Hennessey, James, SJ. American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- John Paul II. Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of the United States, April 3, 1983. Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1983.

- Kopp, Lillanna (Sr. Audrey), SFCC. The New Nuns: Collegial Christians, a Sociological Analysis. Chicago: Argus Communications Company, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Sudden Spring: 6th Stage Sisters, Trends of Change in Catholic Sisterhoods, a Sociological Analysis. Waldport, OR: Sunspot Publications, 1983.
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Widening the Dialogue: Reflections on Evangelica Testificatio. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Religious, 1974.
- Lewin, Arie. Policy Sciences: Methodologies and Cases. New York: Pergamon Press, 1976.
- Lewin, Kurt. A Dynamic Theory of Personality. New York: McGraw and Hill, 1935.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Field Theory in Social Science. London: Tavistock, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Consequences of Authoritarian and Democratic Leadership." In Studies in Leadership: Leadership and Democratic Action, ed. Alvin Gouldner, 409-17. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950.
- McGoldrick, Ruth, SP, and Cassian J. Yuhaus, CP, eds. Facets of the Future: Religious Life USA. Washington: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 1976.
- National Congress of Religious in the United States. Religious Life in the Church Today: Prospect and Retrospect. Proceedings of the Women's Section of the Second National Congress of Religious in the United States. South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 1961.
- Neal, Sr. Marie Augusta, SND de Namur. From Nuns to Sisters: An Expanding Vocation. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990.
- Olmstead, Michael. The Small Group. New York: Random House, 1959.
- Paul VI. "Address to Nuns," 16 May 1966. To the Fourteenth General Conference of the Union of Major Superiors of Italy. National Catholic Conference, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Evangelica Testificatio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1971.
- Penet, Sr. Mary Emil, IHM, ed. Report of the Everett Curriculum Workshop. Seattle: Heiden's Mailing Bureau, 1956.
- Pius XII. "Counsel to Teaching Sisters." 15 September 1951. Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference Publications Office, 1992.
- Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate. Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1983.

Schneider, Mary. The Transformation of American Women Religious: The Sister Formation Conference as Catalyst for Change (1954-1964). South Bend, IN: Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, University of Notre Dame, 1986.

Sisters of Charity, BVM. Proceedings of the Institute on the Problems That Unite Us. Mount Carmel, Dubuque, Iowa: Sisters of Charity, 1966.

Tobin, Sr. Mary Luke. Hope is an Open Door. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Valentine, Sister Mary Hester, SSND. The Post-Conciliar Nun. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. Prayer and Renewal. Proceedings and Communications of Regional Meetings of the Sister Formation Conferences, 1969. New York: Fordham University Press, 1970.

Ware, Ann Patrick, ed. If Anyone Can, NCAN. Chicago: National Coalition of American Nuns, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. Midwives of the Future: American Sisters Tell Their Stories. Kansas City: Leaven Press, 1985.

### Periodicals

Doyle, Paul. "College for Nuns: Seattle University Is Meeting Head On the Greatest Challenge in Catholic Education," Catholic Digest (October 1959).

National Catholic Council for Interracial Justice. Newsletter. (October 1964- August 1965).

\_\_\_\_\_. Nuns Newsletter. September 1965- (October 1967).

\_\_\_\_\_. Trans-sister. (November 1967-May 1971).

National Coalition of American Nuns. NCAN News. (October 1969- December 1975).

Sister Formation Conference. Bulletin. (October 1954-Summer 1962).

\_\_\_\_\_. Bulletin. (October 1962-Summer 1964).

Secondary Sources

General

- Beane, Marjorie Noterman. From Framework to Freedom: a History of the Sister Formation Conference. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993.
- Berenstein, Marcelle. The Nuns. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976.
- Borromeo, Sister M. Charles, CSC. The New Nuns. New York: Signet Books, 1976.
- Cmeil, Kenneth. "The Politics of Civility." In The Sixties: From Memory to History, ed. David Farber, 236-90. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Day, Thomas. Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste. New York: Crossroad, 1990.
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose Fuchs. Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational Decline in Catholic Religious Orders in the United States. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993.
- Foster, John. Requiem for a Parish. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962.
- Gibeau, Dawn. "Where Have All the Charisms Gone? They're Alive and (Frequently) Being Adapted in New and Old Communities." National Catholic Reporter, supplement (February 17, 1995) 1.
- Greeley, Andrew. The American Catholic: A Social Portrait. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Catholic Experience: The History of American Catholicism. New York: Image Books, 1969.
- Herman, Ellen. The Romance of American Psychology. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Being and Doing." In Sights on the Sixties, Barbara Tischler. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- Kidnay, Joan A. "Sister Mary Luke Tobin: A Religious Vision in Society." M.A. thesis, University of Colorado, 1987.
- King, Margot H., ed. A Leaf from the Great Tree of God: Essays in Honor of Ritamary Bradley. Toronto: Peregrina Press, 1993.

- Kolinre, Elizabeth, ASC. Religious Women in the United States: A Survey of the Influential Literature, 1950 to 1983. Wilmington: Michael Glazier Publishers, 1984.
- Lieblich, Julia. Sisters: Lives of Devotion and Defiance. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.
- Meyers, Sr. Bertrand, DC. Sisters for the 21st Century. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965.
- Milhaven, Annie Lally, ed. The Inside Stories: 13 Valiant Women Challenging the Church. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987.
- Modde, Sr. Margaret Mary, OSF. A Canonical Study of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) of the United States of America. Doctor of Canon Law Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1977.
- Quinonez, Sr. Lora Ann, CDP, ed. Starting Points: Six Essays Based on the Experience of U.S. Women Religious. Washington: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1980.
- Quinonez, Sr. Lora Ann, CDP, and Sr. Mary Daniel Turner, SDPdeN. The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
- Shannon, Sr. Jo Ellen. "An Interview with Network," Sisters Today. 51 (August-September 1979): 17-21.
- Tate, Judith. Religious Women in the Modern World. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Sisters for the World. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.
- Weaver, Mary Jo. New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Authority. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986.

#### Catholic Radicalism

- Berrigan, Daniel. The Trial of the Catonsville Nine. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Coy, Patrick G., ed. A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.
- Cronin, John Francis. Catholic Social Action. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1948.
- Ellsberg, Robert, ed. By Little and by Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day. New York: Knopf, 1983.

- Gray, Francine du Plessix. Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism. New York: Knopf, 1970.
- Halpert, Stephen, and Tom Murray, eds. Witness of the Berrigans. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- McDonough, Peter. Men Astutely Trained: A History of the Jesuits in the American Century. New York: Free Press, 1992.
- Meconis, Charles A. With Clumsy Grace: The American Catholic Left, 1961-1975. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.
- Mueller, Franz Hermann. The Church and the Social Question. Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984.

#### Oral History Methodology

- Allen, Barbara, and William Lynwood Montell. From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.
- Evans, George Ewart. Spoken History. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.
- Grele, Ronald J., ed. Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony. Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1975.