

FEMMES/ACTION/RELIGION

In the history of women, Christianity plays an ambiguous role. God may no doubt speak to whom He pleases, in a manner which breaks apart the relationships of subordination. At the same time, the concept of divine sanction for existing authority relations, and the full panoply of ecclesiastical institutions, have historically provided a powerful justification for the maintenance of the status quo. Christianity at a wide variety of places and times has supported subordinate roles for women. Nonetheless, women have also gained authority through roles in the church, whether as mystics, teaching nuns, female missionaries or even family matriarchs. The morality preached by the church in some contexts empowered some women: to preach to men sexual fidelity, temperance and frugality was not necessarily against the interests of nineteenth-century Canadian wives, for example. It is, furthermore, impossible to generalise about the attitudes of women, many of whom eagerly embraced such concepts as a lifetime of service, or particular gender roles within the family.

In other words, there is a vast and fertile area for debate on the complex issue of women, religion and authority. This was the starting point for a Quebec-government funded FCAR research team on "Femmes/Action/Religion" which formed in 1998.

A group of four scholars from the Université de Montréal, McGill University and the Université Laval, including two historians, a feminist literary theorist and a theologian, we were (and are) interested in exploring the relationship between women, religion and female agency in a variety of comparative contexts.

The group proved to have particular common interests in women and colonialism, since three of us were in one way or another working on Christian women and colonialism. This introduced a further layer of ambiguity. White Christian female missionaries and missionary wives putatively sought to "liberate" other women from the gender roles of "heathenism" - British women in southern Africa often thought that African women were enslaved by their work roles and by the custom of lobola, for example. Sometimes in the process white women liberated themselves, but they often misunderstood the alien societies with which they were confronted. Such missionary women frequently played a complicit role in colonialism and in the undermining of indigenous cultures, even as they confronted male authority structures within the missions themselves and provided genuine opportunities to female converts. Mission Christianity thus posed similar dilemmas around the issue of authority to the many colonized women who confronted the calls of mission Christianity for the submission both of women and of the colonized, even as they sought to use Christianity to their own ends. Seventeenth-century Amerindian women who enclosed

themselves in convents, for example, adopted an apparently misogynistic regime and abandoned their previous freedom of movement and action. At the same time, many such women sought to use Christianity to provide shamanistic power in crisis situations such as famine and epidemics. We have explored such issues in comparative perspective in New France, British North America and southern Africa. We have also benefited from the insights of our graduate students and colleagues working across an even wider geographical range.

We have enjoyed exploring questions and confronting ideas, without necessarily trying to reconcile antagonistic theories and approaches. Over the past two years the core faculty have integrated these themes into graduate seminars on related topics in the three universities. We have also hosted a number of speakers and held fruitful open discussions. In 1997/8, for example, we organized a series of three roundtables on, in turn, the vexed historiographical issues of the "frontier", the evolving concept of "gender", and the "other". We were particularly interested to compare historiographical approaches in French and English. There were indeed some notable points of contrast: even finding a clear-cut translation for "gender" proved difficult. We settled for "les rapports sociaux de sexe", but this clearly left many issues hanging. It also struck us that the French-language literature tends to be more optimistic than the English about the epistemological constraints on "knowledge" of the "other"/"l'Autre". Further systematic work across linguistic barriers seems fruitful to us. Another highlight of that year was the visit from France of Nicole Pellegrin to present work on cross-dressing women, and to lead seminars at the Université Laval.

In 1998/9 we held a series of workshops and seminars on women, religions and identity. Seminar speakers included Karen Kupperman of New York University on Pocahontas and colonial Virginia, Allan Greer of the University of Toronto on Kateri Tekawitha and Mohawk female spirituality, Nancy Partner of McGill University on women identity and autonomy in the middle ages, Susan Dalton of the Université de Montréal on les femmes précieuses in eighteenth-century Italy and France, and Susan Mann of York University and McGill on women travellers from Canada to Great Britain. We were fortunate enough to benefit from the congenial setting of the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women for this speaker series. We also held morning workshops with graduate students and colleagues from participating universities on historiographical themes related to the speaker series.

We are currently in the process of organizing a further speaker series this year on women, Christianity and colonialism. We will also hold a workshop in Montreal in summer 2000 on women

and missions. Submissions and suggestions to either are more than welcome. Please contact Elizabeth Elbourne of the Department of History of McGill University (elbourne@leacock.lan.mcgill.ca), or Dominique Deslandres of the Department of History of the Université de Montréal (dominique.deslandres@umontreal.ca). In the meantime, individual faculty members and affiliated graduate students continue to pursue their own work. For example, Claudie Vanasse spent a six-month FCAR internship in Clermont-Serrand, France, working on Ursuline women for her now completed M.A. thesis. Louise Vachon wrote an M.A. thesis on Madame D'Alleboust, religious devotion and chastity, while Masarah Van Eyck continues her doctoral work under the supervision of Pierre Boule at McGill University on "The

Amerindian Body: Early Modern Perspectives." Dominique Deslandres has included a chapter on women missionaries in New France in her forthcoming book "Croire et faire croire" (Fayard 2000), while Elizabeth Elbourne is working on articles on ideas of domesticity and dispossession in colonial South Africa, and on missionary wives and the construction of whiteness in the early nineteenth century. Overall, this collective work and the debates and confrontations with complexity which it has involved continue to engage us intellectually.

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WOMEN AND PUBLIC HISTORY IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: A SURVEY

Since 1976, the CHA has conducted surveys on the status of "Women in the Historical Profession." The most recent, by Ruby Heap, is summarized in this *Bulletin*. This time, however, a committee of historians and archivists employed in the Historical Research (HR) category in the federal civil service conducted a companion survey on the status of women as public historians. Public historians are also historians, the CHA has finally come to recognize. The results of this first-ever survey of women in public will be reported in more detail in an upcoming issue of the *Canadian Historical Review*. The Committee sent questionnaires to 238 HR's employed in the federal public service as archivists, historians and archaeologists at Parks Canada, the National Archives of Canada and other agencies. An encouraging rate of return of approximately 50%, (122 returned questionnaire) with a higher rate of return among women than men, indicated a healthy interest in the subject of women's status as public historians.

Despite similar educational attainments, women were under-represented in the higher levels of HR's, and were younger by approximately 4 years on average. Women HR's were more likely to finish their degree before taking a full time position, and were younger in attaining their most recent degree than were men (26.8 vs. 29.5 yrs.). Women were also younger than men (28.8 vs. 30.4 years) when they obtained their first full time indeterminate position. Women might be said to be more committed to the public service as a first career choice, as indicated in the significant number of individuals, 2/3 of them men, who had either held, or sought, an academic post.

Among the HR respondents, 75% were either married or in common law relationship, and a further 45% reported having

children under the age of 18. Twenty-five of the respondents had used maternity benefits with their last child, and 15% with other children. Many gave a positive assessment of maternity benefits in the federal civil service, ease of re-entry following maternity leave, and a work environment sensitive to the needs of reconciling work and family obligations.

When asked about their perceptions regarding the quality of the work environment for women, a significant discrepancy was noted between men and women. On questions regarding the existence of discrimination against women, employment equity, the impact of part time work on career mobility, the place of women's history in program delivery and the sharing of parenting duties, men consistently gave a more positive assessment. In fact, they seemed almost unanimous in reporting that such issues had been resolved. Women, however, gave a much more pessimistic view of the progress made. In addition, it appears that women felt alienated from, or best indifferent to, the Peers System of promotion. A major channel for promotion for HR's, the Peers System recognizes outstanding contributions above and beyond normal job requirements such as publications and committee work. These are difficult for women to accomplish as many reported doing a large share of the caring and housekeeping work at home. The survey also reported that some Francophone women felt doubly disadvantaged as women and as Francophones in the civil service.

Dianne Dodd

“STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE HISTORICAL PROFESSION IN CANADA” RESULTS OF SURVEY CONDUCTED IN 1998 WITH FEMALE AND MALE PROFESSORS IN CANADIAN DEPARTMENTS OF HISTORY*

In 1989, Linda Kealey, professor in the Department of History, Memorial University, submitted to the Canadian Historical Association a report on the survey she had conducted that year on “The Status of Women in the Historical Profession in Canada.” A first survey on this issue had been conducted by the CHA in 1977-78 under the supervision of Judith Fingard, professor in the Department of History, Dalhousie University, who also produced a final report. In order to assess both the continuities and changes in the status of women in the historical profession in Canada, a new survey was conducted in the spring of 1998 in both official languages. 468 individuals were sent the questionnaire, 238 women and 230 men. More than half of the women (55%) and a third of the men (34%) responded. 62% of our respondents were women, while 38% were men. 89% answered the survey in English, and 11% in French. Our male respondents tended to be older than the women, a trend reported also by the 1989 Kealey Report.

Since the questionnaire sent in 1998 closely resembled the one submitted in 1989, interesting comparisons could be made with the findings presented by Professor Kealey. However, new questions were added, which dealt with marital status, post-doctoral fellowships, administrative duties and the teaching of women's history.

Here are some of the main conclusions drawn from the 1998 Survey.

1. Over 90% of our female and male respondents had their doctorates, with a higher percentage for the women surveyed. These women had received their PHD much more recently than their male counterparts. 46% of the women respondents had obtained a post-doctoral fellowship, as opposed to 34% of the men. If we look at the educational paths of our respondents, we depict in 1998 patterns similar to those revealed in 1989: men took 9.2 years from the BA to the PHD, while women took an average of 10.6 years.
2. While the great majority of our female respondents were employed full-time, there were more women working part-time, on a contract or course by course basis, than their male counterparts, a trend reported by the Kealey Report in 1989. On the other hand, there was a higher percentage of men in tenured positions, although we must note that there was a much larger proportion of women were in tenured positions in 1998 (63%) than in 1989 (51%).

3. Close to half of our female respondents had obtained their first appointment in the 1990's, as opposed to 20% of the men. This data reflects the younger age of the female respondents and the fact that they obtained their doctorates more recently; it could also be indicative of the application of equity policies over the last decade, although many female respondents expressed doubts as to their effectiveness.
4. Things have not changed much during the last decade when one looks at the rank held within the profession. While women and men were nearly equally represented at the instructor/lecturer level in 1998, women were over-represented at the assistant and associate levels, and strongly underrepresented at the level of full professor. These results closely resemble those of Professor Kealey's.
5. In 1998 as in 1989, there were significant differences between the experiences of men and women with regards to their career paths. Men began their career as assistant professor at a younger age (31.9y) than women (34.7y), a trend which persists up until the level of full professor (43.2y for men and 47y for women). On the other hand, both women and men had moved a bit faster through the various ranks in 1998, as compared to 1989. Women thus averaged 12.3 years from the rank of assistant professor to that of full professor in 1998, while they averaged 14.2 years in 1989. Men averaged 11.3 years in 1998, as opposed to 12.2 years in 1989.
6. 59% of the female respondents reported having children or being actively involved in child care responsibilities, as opposed to 48% of men. 18% of the women reported having experienced “a major career interruption” (not to be associated with a maternity or parental leave) because of child care responsibilities, while 14% of the men did. In view of these fairly close results, it would be interesting to explore more closely the nature of these major interruptions according to gender, a question the survey did not address. When asked to rate their institution's provisions for parental leave “beyond the minimum leave prescribed by the law”, women and men responded in a very similar way. About 40% rated them as adequate, and 15% as inadequate. On the other hand, both women and men, but women especially, expressed much more

dissatisfaction with regards to the child care services provided by their institution.

7. Half of the female respondents reported having held or presently holding various kinds of administrative positions at a university, while 61% of their male colleagues answered the same. Women are thus getting closer to men in terms of general administrative experience. On the other hand, only 17% of the women had served as departmental chairs, as compared to 61% of the men. Indeed, the greatest disparity we recorded between women and men in the area of administration was at the department chair level.
8. In 1998 as in 1989, the women and men surveyed were asked if they believed that there was any discrimination against women members in their department with regard to initial salaries, promotions and tenure. The proportion of women who reported discrimination in these three areas was slightly less in 1998 than in 1989; however, in 1998 as in 1989, many more women than men expressed the belief that discrimination did exist. Similarly, many more female than male respondents felt that women did not receive the same treatment as men with regard to teaching load, participation in departmental committees and especially with regards to informal consultation and networking. Finally, more women than men expressed the belief that they were also not getting their fair share in the higher administrative ladder, where the positions holding the most power and prestige were still occupied by men.
9. Concerning the status of women's history, 76% of our female respondents reported teaching women's history courses at all levels. There thus seems to be -and this is not very surprising- a close association between the hiring of women faculty and the growth of women's history as a field of teaching. There were both agreement and disagreement between the women and men who rated the status of women's history as a field of teaching and research. On the one hand, close to a third of the women (28%) rated it as "poor" or "fair," while 21% of the men did the same. On the other hand, close to half of the men (46%) rated it as "good," with a third of the women (31%) felt the same way. Only 8% of the women and 9% of the men rated the status of women's history as "excellent." Overall, in 1998 as in 1989, women were more pessimistic than

their male colleagues on this matter. However, the two sets of data reveal that women faculty were much more negative ten years ago about the status of women's history than they were in 1998.

10. Men and women's perceptions differed also when they were asked to rate the "status of women in the historical profession." Overall, men tended to have a much more positive perception of the situation, with 71% of them rating it as "good and very good." On the other hand, more than a third of our female respondents (32%) thought that the status of women historians was "poor and fair," while 63% believed it to be "good and very good." There were also twice as many men (5.3%) than women (2.4%) who thought that the status of women's historians was "excellent." However, as was the case for the status of women's history, female and male respondents expressed in 1998 a much more positive perception of the status of women in the historical profession than in 1989. This is one of the most positive findings that came out of our survey. One should not dismiss, however, the problems which remain and the belief shared by many of our female respondents that sexism still exists within academia and that the "ideal," "serious" or "model" historian is still associated with the male sex.

Ruby Heap, University of Ottawa. A more detailed analysis and concluding recommendations will appear in a forthcoming issue of the Canadian Historical Review. The full report is available at the CHA main office. A French translation of this piece will appear in the next Bulletin.

* La version française de ce texte sera publiée dans la prochaine livraison du Bulletin.

