Conference on “The Spirituality of Religious Women: From the Old World to the Antipodes, 1400-1900” to be held in Melbourne 11th -12th May 2007 at the newly opened facility of United Faculty of Theology, Parkville.

Against the backdrop of a number of significant anniversaries including the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the canonisation of Angela Merici (1475-1540); the 125th anniversary of the arrival of Ursulines in Australia; the 150th anniversary of the Foundation of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan; the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ’s) in Melbourne; and the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Melbourne, it is proposed to hold a conference in Melbourne on the theme of the spiritualities of female religious orders.

This conference will address two important questions:

1. What were the distinctive characteristics of the spiritualities of such medieval and early modern women's religious orders as the Benedictines, Poor Clares, Loretos and Ursulines?

2. How did nineteenth-century women religious adapt and re-shape these and other spiritual traditions to the context of colonial Australia?

Co-convenors: Dr Claire Renkin and Dr Katherine Massam

Postgraduate students are especially welcome. The conference encourages interdisciplinary approaches, and possible paper topics may address one or more of the following themes:

*Women’s religious orders acted as transmitters of cultural identity from Europe to its colonies. These women and the institution they represented, the Roman Catholic Church, remained a visible embodiment of the Europe from which they had emigrated. In what ways did European heritage impact on women's religious orders in Australia?

*What was the role of religious women in establishing important social and educational institutions in Europe and Australia?

*In what ways did religious women contribute to the implementation of technological innovation?

*How is the plurality of women’s religious spiritualities expressed in written and visual sources?

Abstracts (200 words) should be submitted by March 1st to Dr Renkin at: claire@betterlink.com.au

As an experiment this conference will include a session tentatively called “Spinning the Threads,” where potential paper-givers will state the rudiments of future projects in no more than five minutes. We hope that a group of such brief presentations will stimulate discussion about future directions in the study of the history of Women Religious in Europe and Australia.

Prospective participants would help us if they could specify an interest in taking part in this portion of the program.

The conference is sponsored by the Australian Research Council: Network for Early European Research (ARC NEER) and the Melbourne College of Divinity.