

Whilst many scholars have viewed community as having a positive function, Melanie Nolan reminds us that in recent scholarship working-class and left-wing communities, once thought to be particularly coherent, are being reconsidered in terms of divisions and conflicts over gender. In a study of Wellington's Labour women 1919–1949, Nolan explores the fragility of community and concludes with the need to fracture the idea of community and not to conflate class and gender.

Providing 'race' as yet another axis along which to consider community are the chapters by Kathy Hermes and Alexandra Maravel and Marilyn Lake. Hermes and Maravel, in a fascinating study, use colonial probate records from Connecticut to examine a group of Native American women in the context of colonization. They argue that men and women reacted to first encounters with Europeans and later colonization in ways that 'reflect gender differences as well as unique tribal experiences with particular colonists'. Their study reveals a community of women at once assimilating and resisting colonization. The community, they argue, was not one based on place, but rather a common purpose. The volume fittingly concludes with Marilyn Lake's thought-provoking chapter on political communities. Through a study of the fight for Australian Aboriginal Citizenship rights in the 1950s and 1960s, Lake considers the 'repression of difference' required in imagined communities. She points to the challenge of promoting self-determination while simultaneously recognizing that the self constituted in racial, sexual and cultural differences still remains for those seeking to build political communities.

MEGAN WOODS

Christchurch

Mary Potter's Little Company of Mary: The New Zealand Experience, 1914–2002. By Ann Trotter. Bridget Williams Books for the Little Company of Mary, Wellington, 2003. 228 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877242-31-4.

THE LITTLE COMPANY OF MARY is a Catholic order of religious sisters, affectionately known as the Blue Nuns, dedicated to the care of the sick and the dying. Founded in England by Mary Potter in 1877, the order spread to a number of countries before her death in 1913. Its members are trained nurses who established hospitals in Christchurch (1914), Wellington (1929), Hawera (1956), and Invercargill (1968) as well as a mission and medical clinic in Tonga (1975). The Christchurch and Wellington hospitals were initially called Lewisham, after the Sydney Lewisham Hospital (named after its suburb) from whence the New Zealand sisters had originally come, but in 1953 the New Zealand establishments became known as Calvary Hospitals.

After arriving in New Zealand at a time of growing sectarian tension, the sisters have, throughout their subsequent history, earned the respect and admiration of the communities in which they worked. This was demonstrated particularly in public financial support; for example, a broad ecumenical base was a notable feature of the fund-raising campaign for the Invercargill hospital in the early 1960s. While they attracted government subsidies to maintain their hospitals, the sisters must have saved the state huge sums of money by complementing the public health system.

Ann Trotter's book is a tribute to the Little Company of Mary and the self-sacrificing dedication of the sisters to the health of New Zealanders. As its title suggests, it is also intended to make better-known the founder whose name is linked to two remaining establishments in Christchurch and Wellington. Thus, there is a brief chapter on Mary Potter and her context and vision. Her spirituality was deeply influenced by St Louis Grignon (or Grignion) de Montfort, (1673–1716, canonized in 1947), author of the *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, and, despite the discouragement of her

family and the ecclesiastical authorities, she proceeded to establish an order of nurses imbued with this ethos. It is disappointing, therefore, that there is so little exploration of the sisters' spirituality — probably the aspect of their lives most in need of elucidation for an early twenty-first century New Zealand readership. That said, there is a very fine evocation (pp.72–77) of the Sydney novitiate that formed the New Zealand sisters before 1960. Along the way, moreover, Trotter offers fleeting insights into the sisters' way of life: for many years, they did not drive cars or read newspapers, and they were not given regular days off until the 1960s.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) inaugurated an era of change in the Catholic Church generally but particularly in the lives of its religious orders, which were charged with re-evaluating their lifestyles and missions to determine how their founders' original visions could best be fulfilled in contemporary society. This process coincided with a crisis in recruitment as fewer and fewer Catholics aspired to a religious vocation, with its vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. There was also attrition, as some sisters, especially but not exclusively younger ones, found that the lifestyle they originally sought no longer existed.

However, the sisters had always been remarkably adaptable. In Christchurch they had branched out into maternity care in 1940, opened the Mary Potter Wing as a hospice for the terminally ill in 1955, and established a psychiatric day clinic in 1962. By then, though, the escalating costs of providing technologically advanced and increasingly specialized medical care were becoming prohibitive for non-profit organizations. Moreover, in a country with a well-established public health care system, maintaining private hospitals did not necessarily answer the most pressing needs of the community in the spirit of Mary Potter. When the Christchurch hospital was sold in 1979, the sisters retained and expanded the Mary Potter Wing for the elderly as the Mary Potter Hospital. After the Wellington Calvary Hospital was sold in 1987, they contributed to the re-establishment of the Mary Potter Hospice on a new site and continued to be represented on the trust board. The order no longer maintains hospitals or large convents; the sisters live in small communities or alone and work in a variety of health-care roles.

Organized by chronology and location, with numerous sub-headings and an index, the book is easy to read and is accessible as a reference work. On some key issues, like relations with the Health Department, the role of government subsidies, and the place of private hospitals in a welfare state, there is a lot of material. Perhaps inevitably, though, the book's narrative structure means that other important themes are less fully documented (and they are not always indexed). Examples include the tension between the sisters' desire to offer free medical care while having to charge at least wealthier patients, and the extent of non-Catholic support for and use of the order's hospitals — both as patients and as staff. The limited discussion of the underlying rationale for Church hospitals probably reflects the sources (certainly, the Catholic press was surprisingly laconic on this issue).

Written in a marvellously crisp and fast-paced style, the book is almost free of typographical errors — though the Catholic Federation was founded in 1912, not 1922 (p.24), and the Papal Legate in the 1940s was Archbishop Panico, not Pancio (pp.50–51). Largely based on the order's own records and on interviews, this attractively produced book includes a list of the sisters who have served in New Zealand, many of whom feature in its 60 black and white photographs. This is a welcome contribution to the religious, health and women's history of both New Zealand and Tonga.

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