

Pioneer Spirit

Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth

By Mary Ellen Doyle

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006. Pp. xvi, 286. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

Mary Ellen Doyle's *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* adds to a literature that highlights the role of Roman Catholic sisters and nuns in building religion and nation. Set within the context of frontier Kentucky, this biography of the foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth illuminates the intersection between overarching historical events and personal spiritual conviction.

Spalding's work embraced the years 1813 to 1858, a time when the country confronted the challenges of territorial expansion, economic instability, rising immigration, vicious nativism, and widespread slavery. Kentucky proved to be influenced by all those elements, as were Mother Catherine and her congregation. In addition, the practice of Catholicism in Kentucky, as Spalding experienced it, underscored the struggles of a frontier church overseen in the main by imperious and abrasive foreign-born clerics, who showed few qualms about exploiting the sisters laboring in poverty at mission outposts.

The author draws on an impressive array of primary materials—many of them in the archives of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth at Nazareth, Kentucky—to recount the life of this remarkable leader, teacher,

caregiver, and administrator who effectively energized education and health services on the midwestern frontier. Employing meticulous research, Doyle—herself a member of Spalding's congregation—keeps a balanced tone, generally avoiding hagiography and never claiming more than the documents substantiate. Doyle maps out the hardships of life and death at western missions; the economic uncertainties facing a new congregation; the clashes with religious and secular associates; the sorrows, joys, and friendships within a community of vowed religious; the successes and failures for women in a rigidly gendered church; and the stresses created by a virulent anti-Catholicism that settled over Kentucky. Some lay readers may find the detail daunting, but the author aims to resolve certain mysteries and controversies surrounding Spalding's life and she tries to do so thoroughly and fairly.

Most impressively, the author tackles the unpleasant subject of slave-holding by Spalding and her sisters—including an account of the death by poisoning of Sister Ann Spalding (Mother Catherine's biological sister) at the hands of a young black girl. Doyle's direct confrontation of this sensitive topic stands out

as a highly commendable feature of this study. Still, the author's conclusion that slave ownership reflected, among other factors, Kentucky culture and economics of the era remains less than satisfying. Historians have not been willing to excuse Thomas Jefferson for his slave-operated plantation by virtue of the "product of his times" argument; the Quaker John Woolman, as some have noted, mounted unpopular anti-slavery protests as early as the 1750s.

If Doyle falters in this area, she more than compensates in her conclusions about the growth of social justice initiatives by Spalding's congregation. Doyle's gracefully written summary links the past to the present, demonstrating that Spalding's complex legacy led her religious daughters to activism that tran-

scended state, region, and country and promoted the best impulses for the well-being of all peoples. *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* convinces the reader that through her dramatic and productive life Spalding merited this fine scholarly biography. It shows as well that women in sisterhood had an impact on frontier Kentucky, influenced the religious and secular narrative of the nation, and continue to shape modern America.

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Good Hearts *Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past* By Suellen Hoy

(Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006. Pp xiv, 242. Photographs, notes, index. Paperbound, \$22.00.)

Suellen Hoy, guest professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, has written an important collection of essays on the history of the nuns of Chicago. Hoy's work takes us on an intellectual journey, following the path of the nuns from the 1846 arrival of five Sisters of Mercy (the first community of nuns in the city) to the highly visible efforts of the nuns who took part in the civil rights demon-

strations of the 1960s. Along the way, she establishes a rightful place for these women in the historical discussion of urban women activists. As American academics have been largely uncomfortable with, or ignorant of, the role of religious leaders in shaping our modern cities, historians have not yet adequately documented these stories. Hoy's collection goes a long way towards remedying this over-