Megan Armstrong, McMaster University

“The Holy Land, the Friars, and the Reinvention of the Catholic Tradition, 1517-1700”

While it is certainly true that one can over-emphasize the importance of particular historical dates, 1517 marked an era of dramatic and unsettling change for the Observant friars of the Holy land Mission. It was in this year that Martin Luther set in motion the rapid disintegration of the once unified Western Church, and also when the Ottomans wrestled control of the Christian holy places and its environs from the Mamluk rulers of Egypt. It was also in this year that the Franciscan brotherhood recognized the irresolvable nature of mounting internal dissension by formally recognizing two independent families within its midst: the Conventual and Observant orders. The intent of this paper is to situate Franciscan engagement the Holy land at the intersection of these forces of political and religious change. The writings of the brothers, including chronicles, pilgrimage treatises, and correspondence reveal a profound preoccupation with the Holy land as a critical source of spiritual authentication for the struggling Post-Reformation Roman Church, and a special role for the Observant friars as latter-day apostles.

Jodi Bilinkoff, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

“Alonso de la Madre de Dios (1568-1636): A ‘Prodigal Son’ Remembers John of the Cross”

In April 1587 the renowned mystic and co-founder of the Discalced Carmelites, John of the Cross, visited the order’s friary in the Castilian city of Segovia. A few months earlier a young man of nineteen had entered this house as a novice, taking the name Alonso de la Madre de Dios. Many years later as a mature friar Alonso would vividly recall how John had taken him aside and spoken to him of God and the obligations of his vocation. After this brief discourse he “embraced me and gave me his blessing.” Alonso de la Madre concluded this personal anecdote with a prayer, desiring that John would one day “grant a similar favor to this his prodigal son at the hour of my death.”

In this paper I examine the monastic career of Alonso de la Madre de Dios and how he dedicated himself to preserving John’s memory. As organizer of beatification hearings, biographer, and guardian of John’s tomb and bodily remains, Alonso, I suggest played a pivotal role in constructing his order’s early history. Beyond this single example of identity-formation, his life sheds light on the forging of affective relationships among male religious in early modern Spain. Finally, I offer my interpretation of why Alonso would equate himself with the problematic figure of the Prodigal Son.
Daniel Bornstein, Washington University in Saint Louis

“Other Catherines”

Raymond of Capua depicted Catherine of Siena as a saint better suited for admiration than imitation. Traveling about freely, moving in a mixed company of men and women, self-starvation, frequent communion, excessive asceticism, and a public apostolate: all these were actions that stirred criticism, required a spirited defense, and made Catherine a dubious model for the religious – or even quasi-religious – life. And yet, within less than two decades of her death, Catherine had inspired the first of a long series of women who were explicitly described by their biographers as imitators of the Sienese saint – a string of holy women that would stretch over the centuries and reach continents unknown to Catherine and Raymond.

This talk surveys a number of these “other Catherines,” starting with the Venetian penitent Maria Sturion (1379-1399) and continuing with the Italian “sante vive” of the early sixteenth century: Colomba of Rieti (1467-1501), Osanna Andreasi of Mantua (1449-1505), Lucia Broccadelli of Narni (1476-1544), Stefana Quinzani of Orzinovi, near Brescia (1457-1530), Caterina Mattei of Racconigi (1486-1547). It then turns to examples from the early modern expansion of Counter-Reformation Catholicism around the world: Rose of Lima (1586-1617), the first American to be canonized; the Mohawk holy woman Catherine Tekakwitha (1656-1680); and a cluster of Chinese beatas from the southern county of Fuan, including Petronilla Chen (c. 1625-1710s). Together, their stories show how the emergent norms of the post-Tridentine Catholic Church pressed these “other Catherines” toward the sort of ordered, subordinated, and cloistered life that Catherine herself had vigorously rejected.

Mónica Díaz, Georgia State University

“Indians in the Church: Petitions for Religious Communities in Eighteenth-Century Mexico”

In 1790, Sister María Manuela, an indigenous nun from the Convent of Corpus Christi, wrote a letter to viceroy Revillagigedo requesting the viceroy’s support for the foundation of a fourth convent for indigenous women. Sister Maria asks the viceroy to consider the good that would result from the religious education of so many indigenous women, and she adds that there aren’t enough convents for Indians. Sister Maria’s arguments were similar to arguments that Don Julian Cirilo de Castilla, an indigenous priest from the city of Tlaxcala, made in a letter in 1753, in which he requested a seminary for indigenous men. Don Julian based his request on the Laws of the Indies, which called for the foundation of schools for Indian nobles; he also noted the shortage of spaces for their education. The letters by Sister Maria and Don Julian are two examples of the ways in which indigenous peoples contributed to formal petitions for the opening of religious spaces exclusively for their race. Their letters and other documents included in the petitions provide opportunities to examine how indigenous peoples actively participated in shaping the religious life of their communities. In this paper, I will analyze the rhetoric and language that were used to argue for these religious spaces in a sample of the petitions filed between 1750 and 1810, and will offer insight into the communal identity that indigenous peoples developed and maintained in late colonial times.

*Archivo General de la Nación, Indiferente virreinal, caja 2645, exp. 002, folio 2.
†Archivo General de Indias, Mexico, 1937.
Barbara Diefendorf, Boston University

“Catholic Militants in France’s Protestant Heartland: The Capuchins of Languedoc”

In 1582, fifteen Capuchins came from Rome to establish a house in southwestern France. They came into a region torn by religious schism and civil war at the request of a president of the Parlement of Toulouse, who hoped that the ascetic lives and ardent preaching of the friars would strengthen the faith of his fellow Catholics and prompt conversions in the Protestant heartland around Toulouse. Problems were legion; the Italian priests sent from Rome did not speak French and could offer only the example of their mortified lives. The congregation nevertheless took root and, in the intervals between wars, began to spread rapidly. When the wars finally ended in 1629, the Capuchins had established forty houses and five mission outposts in southwestern France. Telling the story of these foundations, the paper will focus on the question of how the Capuchins gained the popular and elite support necessary to their rapid expansion. It will assess the popularity the friars gained by risking their lives during repeated epidemics of plague but also consider the way in which such public rituals as planting the cross to mark a house’s foundation, laying the first stone for the new buildings, and consecrating the completed church attracted public notice and support to the order. It will evaluate the respective roles of elite, bourgeois, and civic patronage in financing the foundations. And it will look at the conflicts that not infrequently arose when the friars attempted to establish houses in Protestant-dominated towns and the impact these conflicts had on the congregation’s spread.

Silvia Evangelisti, University of East Anglia

“Alonso de Benavides, María de Ágreda, and the Spanish Missions of Latin America”

My paper focuses on the case-study of the well-known seventeenth-century Franciscan mystic from Spain, María de Ágreda, and explores the meaning that her contemporaries attributed to her apparitions to the Indians of New Mexico whom she allegedly converted. Analyzing an official missionary report written by a Franciscan friar, published in Madrid in 1630, my paper examines in particular the author’s understanding of María’s encounters with the Indians and the role that other female mystics might have played in it. The paper shows that in the context of seventeenth-century Catholic spirituality and missionary discourses, heavily inclined towards visions and miracles, female supernatural actions were functional to religious and political propaganda because women might be understood as agents of change. Furthermore, rigid gender divides — especially those confining nuns to the cloister and prohibiting them from wandering and preaching — might retain a degree of flexibility, leaving space for more complex interpretations of the symbolic meaning attributed to female agency in the heavily male domain of political discourses and representations of colonial expansion.
Jaime Goodrich, Wayne State University

“Hagiography and Monastic Identity: An English Poor Clare’s Life of Sainte Euphrosina”

Catholicism became illegal in England after the 1558 accession of Elizabeth I, causing English monasticism to languish until the seventeenth century, when enterprising men and women established houses on the Continent specifically for their nation. Besides the practical difficulties involved in exiled life, these institutions faced a pressing conundrum. How could they cultivate a monastic identity when the past fifty years had nearly obliterated English awareness of cloistered life, aside from negative Protestant stereotypes?

One English Poor Clare addressed this problem by making Continental hagiography available to English readers. Catherine Magdalen (Elizabeth) Evelinge (1595–1642), a member of English convents in Gravelines and then Aire, attempted to rouse public support for the restoration of English Franciscanism by publishing her English translations of French lives of two prominent Franciscan nuns: Saint Clare and Saint Catherine of Bologna. Evelinge’s interest in Franciscan spirituality also influenced her most important creative work: a 2600-line poem on Euphrosyne, a fifth-century Egyptian saint who cross-dressed as a man in order to enter a monastery against her father’s wishes. Although Euphrosyne—practically unknown in England during the 17th century—may appear to be an odd choice of subject, Evelinge transforms the saint into a proto-Franciscan model of austerity and poverty. Meant solely for her convent, Evelinge’s Life of Saint Euphrosina simultaneously inculcates Franciscan piety even as it serves as a justification of monasticism itself. Ultimately, this ambitious poem offers a glimpse into the ways that literary production could mold the devotional identity of English convents on the Continent.

Daniel Hanna, Lake Forest College

“Carmelite Poetry after Teresa of Avila: France and the Low Countries”

In the spirit of comparison and contextualization, this paper will present and contextualize poems composed in Carmelite convents in Spain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium in the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. A large group of previously unstudied manuscript poems by Carmelite women in France and the Netherlands/Belgium now demonstrates that the poetic tradition begun by Teresa of Avila in 16th-century Spain was actively maintained as Carmelite convents were established in countries north of the Pyrenees in the centuries that followed. This poetic tradition both flourished and changed in the hands of Carmelite women who lived in geographical and political contexts different from those of Teresa of Avila, and who wrote in languages other than Spanish. In this paper it will be demonstrated that as the Teresian poetic tradition was carried on outside Spain, Carmelite women used it to widely varying ends, ranging from direct imitation of Teresa’s discourse on mystical raptures to vocal defenses of Catholic convent life in the Protestant Netherlands and Revolutionary France.
Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt, Cleveland State University

“Male Outsiders: The Agents of Female Monastic Reform in Transregional Perspective”

In addition to the regular visits of bishops, convents received various male personnel within the cloister. These could include men like doctors and confessors who provided important services to the nuns. Other male guests were less welcome. Under the aegis of various monastic reform efforts, convents encountered male visitors sent to inspect their routines and scrutinize their observance of monastic ideals. These visitors often introduced disruptive changes to the architecture of the convent and the daily lives of the nuns. As such, the interactions between the two groups were tense, if not openly hostile. Scholars of female monasticism have extensively documented these confrontations, but these studies have been very localized. This paper will employ a comparative methodology to examine the background of the men sent to perform these tasks in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century England and Spain. A comparison between these two countries reveals important distinctions. In Spain, for example, male visitors were exclusively clerical, whereas in England laymen were often charged with this task. Differences such as these in the status and identity of male visitors undoubtedly conditioned the reception, pace, and relative success of their visits to the cloister. A more complete portrait of these male “outsiders” in turn enhances our understanding of how and why convents resisted or accepted monastic reform.

Craig A. Monson, Washington University in Saint Louis

“‘In the old days musicians washed the dishes!’ Music as a Source of Convent Conflict”

We are accustomed to considering how music created a sonic space that offered convent women some room to maneuver within a highly regimented system, and to transcend its restrictions by working within and around external expectations. Less familiar is how music might promote internal conflict and serve to disrupt convent communities. Prelates and chroniclers often seem to portray convent music as a catalyst upon women’s irrational propensity for jealousy—half-a-dozen examples come readily to mind for Bologna alone. But how might other factors such as class, age, family status, illegitimacy, national origin figure in such conflicts, not only in more familiar cities such as Milan and Bologna, but also in Naples (1637), Genoa (1644), Gubbio (1654-57), Cosenza (1662-63), Seviglia (1675)? To what extent does the important issue of geriarchy, which loomed large in choir, procession, and refectory, where hierarchy and subordination were acted out, clash with musical realities affected by aging and with committed musicians’ own standards of excellence in musical performance? Might interventions by the external church hierarchy, notably in cities with contentious, unsympathetic bishops, help to foster convent musical strife? Could powerful secular governors offer a balance that worked in convent musicians’ favor and helped defuse potential conflict by making music a “positive” force worth fostering?
Elizabeth Rhodes, Boston College

“How Do You Solve a Problem Like Luisa? Re-thinking Categories of Religious Authority with Luisa de Carvajal”

PLEASE NOTE: This presentation contains material about incest and sexual abuse that can potentially reactivate traumatic response in survivors of either one. Please prepare special measures of self-care and support, if to do so is appropriate for you.

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza (1566 - 1614) was a remarkable woman by all accounts, performing not one but many types of religious experience and authority across her lifetime. While in her native Spain, her life was constricted by official limitations for women religious, and her professions were curtailed by ongoing attempts to box her into tradition: she was an in-house ascetic, a beata, a mystic of sorts, a pretend poor woman, a religious poet, as well as a wealthy patron of the Jesuits and other religious organizations. Her poetry is famously laced with a desire for suffering that some find sadomasochistic. After she received long-sought permission to move to England, her career took a turn for the truly noteworthy, as she became a missionary with her boots on the ground of London, a Catholic activist and leader of the Catholic underground, owner of a safe house for Jesuits and other Catholics, international correspondent, leader of a house of religious women who were neither cloistered nor obedient, and major thorn in the side of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Carvajal’s career suggests that leaving their homeland could provide women with religious authority and experience unavailable to them on their native soil. The archives surely hold evidence of other such women religious, available to scholars who look in unexpected places for evidence of their careers outside not only the ideological boundaries of what we generally understand as the roles of early modern women religious, but the boundaries of nation as well.

Kathryn M. Rudy, University of Saint Andrews

“How Male and Female Franciscans Used Prints before 1500, Compared”

During the last decades of the fifteenth century, a Franciscan beghard in Maastricht whose name may have been Jan van Emmerick collected and trimmed over 200 prints (woodcuts, metalcuts, and engraving) and pasted them into an elaborate handwritten book of hours. Jan was experimenting with new technology by acquiring inexpensive prints that could function as images in a manuscript, thereby rendering obsolete the expensive, laborious, and highly-skilled work of painting miniatures. Franciscan sisters in the nearby town of Arnhem similarly used prints to ornament their manuscripts; they often applied thick gold and painted frames, in order to make the prints closely resemble manuscript illuminations. Although both the male and female Franciscans were making books of hours, the resulting manuscripts fulfilled different functions and used printed embellishments accordingly. The men used their books in-house to teach pupils to read, while the women were making books for sale outside the convent walls.
Ulrike Strasser, University of California, Irvine

“In the Footsteps of Sanvitores: German Jesuits and the Colonization of the Mariana Islands”

This paper explores the experience of German Jesuit missionaries on the Mariana Islands under Spanish colonial rule. Although the Marianas became a crucial stopover for the Manila Galleon already in the mid-sixteenth century, Spain did not set up a formal colonial government on the archipelago until more than one hundred years later. The poverty of the islands and their inhabitants spoke against systematic colonization. When the actual colonization of the Marianas at last commenced in 1668, it occurred at the initiative of Jesuit missionaries bent on converting the ‘poor souls’ on the islands. A Spanish Jesuit, Diego Luis de Sanvitores, led the evangelization efforts. After a few initial successes, however, the native Chamorro began to resist and Sanvitores himself was killed in 1672. His death became a rallying point for the island mission, as Sanvitores was widely hailed as a martyr. His fame also reached the Holy Roman Empire where a virtual run for the Mariana missions set in among German Jesuits. The paper follows the fortunes of a group of German Jesuits who successfully applied for the Mariana missions and set off to the Pacific for follow in Sanvitores’ footsteps. The paper considers the motivation, travels, missionary activities and writings of these Jesuits from the Holy Roman Empire. It further asks to what extent their distinct position as Germans shaped their missionary experience in Spanish colonial context.

Saundra Weddle, Drury University

“Commitment, Conversion, and Conflict: Convent Foundation and Urban Development in Renaissance Venice”

Despite the spiritual and social functions convents served, not everyone welcomed a new community of women religious to their neighborhood of Renaissance Venice. Fierce competition for land and patrons sometimes motivated parishes and monastic institutions to oppose these foundations. Although new communities frequently mitigated their impact on the urban fabric by engaging in an adaptive and accretive practice of converting buildings of various functions to monastic purposes, the introduction of rival devotional centers could destabilize existing communities. The strategies deployed to prevent the establishment of new convents ranged from spurious appeals to monastic rules governing site conditions to allusions to legal minutiae. The protests sometimes lasted for decades, playing out before both secular and religious authorities. Convent archives, site and urban plans, building chronologies, patron family histories, civic building statutes and comparisons with complexes for male monastics inform this study of how patterns of patronage and urban development inflected the ways in which convent architecture publicly redefined and re-presented the identity of the communities it enclosed. Focusing on the houses of San Sepolcro, Sant’Andrea della Zirada, Santa Lucia, and Santa Marta, this paper considers conflicts between convents from a variety of orders and different neighborhoods, revealing how and why monastic communities attempted to manage their status using a range of institutional approaches.
Members of an order of priests living in community established in the late eleventh century, the Lateran Canons Regular of Bologna had their headquarters at the monastic complex of San Giovanni in Monte. During the sixteenth century, the canons devoted much attention and more money than they could afford to expanding and embellishing the church and monastery “for the convenience and use of the canons living in this city, and for the honor and décor of the city.”

This paper focuses first on three Lateran Canons Regular whose activities had an impact on religious currents in and beyond Bologna: Pietro da Lucca (d. 1523), Serafino da Fermo (d. 1540), and Serafino da Bologna (d. 1568). They developed close relationships with charismatic women, notably Elena Duglioli Dall'Olio (d. 1520), whose reputation and revelations they disseminated. Through their preaching in Bologna and elsewhere and their vernacular publications, they disseminated a type of spirituality, inspired by the Devotio Moderna, which served as the connective tissue between several innovative religious groups in the pre-Tridentine period.

Attention then turns to issues of prerogatives and jurisdiction, increasingly contested after the Council of Trent. The Lateran Canons Regular of Bologna insisted on the antiquity of their order and on the abbatial privileges of their superior. They actively supervised the Lateran Canoness Regular convent of San Lorenzo. Once Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti became bishop of Bologna in 1566, he and the canons entered on a collision course.