

MÉLANGES

The Educational Work of Catholic Women Religious in the 19th and 20th Centuries

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY*

Introduction

Despite the fundamental role which Catholic sisters have played in teaching and school administration during the last two centuries, historians of education have started to explore the work and lives of these women only fairly recently. In sharp contrast with the relatively large number of general literature reviews on women religious that have appeared in the last twenty years,¹ so far only one article has addressed the historiography of male and female religious teachers, i.e. an essay by Tom O'Donoghue and Anthony Potts which dates already from 2004.² Although it offers some useful historiographical 'considerations' on teaching sisters, it does not provide an overview and assessment of the international research.

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¹ E.g. E.M. SMYTH, *Writing the History of Women Religious in Canada (1996-2001)*, in: *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d'études canadiennes*, 23 (2001), p. 207-213; C.K. COBURN, *An Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious*, in: *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 22 (2004), p. 1-26; J. DE MAEYER, S. LEPLAE & J. SCHMIEDL (eds.), *Religious Institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (KADOC Studies on Religion, Culture & Society, 2), Leuven, 2004 (with a state of the art of the research on male and female orders in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Germany and Switzerland); S. BURLEY, *An Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious in Australia*, in: *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, 26 (2005), p. 43-60.

² T. O'DONOGHUE & A. POTTS, *Researching the Lives of Catholic Teachers who were Members of Religious Orders: Historiographical Considerations*, in: *History of Education*, 33/4 (2004), p. 469-481.