

The Reluctant Nun

An artist's book by Sheree Kinlyside

Some years ago whilst researching the thread of an idea for a project, I picked up a book titled "The Wayward Nuns of Medieval Literature" (Daichmann, 1986) this introduced me to the works of Chaucer and two intriguing religious figures: Madam Eglentyne, Chaucer's Prioress of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, and the Archpriest of Hita's Dona Garoza, from his *Libro de Buen Amor*. Literary critics have interpreted these characters in diverse ways: from placid, slightly sinful beings, to absolute religious abominations, to purposefully undefined figures characterised by both wicked and virtuous qualities.

Since Chaucer, there have been many other books (literary and factual) and through them, coupled with personal experience, the "convent life" became a kind of reality for me. Nuns became women and also my beloved friends. I learned how these cloistered individuals had undergone their own changes, threats, constraints and interpretations both through the church and from outside.

The Reluctant Nun is by no means a literary object but it is open to interpretation. Is it merely an artist's imagination translated to a story of fear, deception and religious hypocrisy *or* to one of unconditional love, forgiveness and women's resourcefulness? Reader's choice.

I love to study and then write about historical stories of culture and tradition, drawing my own conclusions from many religious and other writings but none in particular. Integrating a feminist approach is of particular importance to me.

This book relates to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, and here I seek to bring fresh meaning to them.

Voluntary **Poverty** means living simply, taking only what is needed from the earth and having foresight in the giving back. Neither being overly acquisitive or materialistic, nor refusing loving gifts when they providentially come our way.

Chastity means purity within our relationships. To live and love chastely is to found all our relationships on integrity, openness and to maintain transparency within them.

Obedience is about listening to and determining our own voice for truth and about being true to our innermost selves.



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In recognition of all my sisters, blood and otherwise.