

Student: It is Friday, November 12th and I am in Lawrence, Kansas with Dr. Beverly Boyd to talk about Philippine Duchesne.

Dr. Boyd, the Religion in Kansas Project seeks to create a public record. Do we have your permission to make this interview available?

Beverly Boyd: Yes, indeed.

Student: Thank you.

To start things off, I understand when you worked for the Department of English at KU; your focus was medieval literature. How did you become interested in Philippine Duchesne/

BB: This in itself is interesting. My doctoral dissertation was on an aspect of saints. I later revised that and published it as the Middle English miracles of the Virgin. I wrote a number of articles on the saints' legends of Medieval England. I had some background in this although I'm primarily a Chaucer scholar.

It just happens that Columbia University is on a hill, like KU, just below it was Manhattan Ville College which had an elementary school attached to it which was pretty convenient because I got a job there as a graduate student. I lived on campus so I didn't have to commute. There was a great big picture of Philippine who had been beatified and I didn't detect great interest in her. I wasn't attracted at all to the picture. I forgot about Philippine when I left New York and pursued my career.

I finally came here in '62. After I had been here for a while, I needed some surgery. I went to the KU medical center, and you know, you get pretty hazy after anesthetic. The Catholic chaplain asked me if I wanted something to read. I may have said something awful, but it amounted to no. I asked, "How about a biography of Bishop Miego," who was big in these parts. He couldn't find one; good reason there wasn't one then. He left me a big brochure out of the Kansas City Star that had a story of her mission in Lynn County and I thought, "I'm on her frontier!" I couldn't believe it. Of course, I got interested, and the next thing I did, after I got well, I went down to Lynn County and went to see the church that was built down there in honor of her beatification. It's a beautiful gothic church with stain glass windows showing her life in North America. One thing led to the next and if that isn't interesting I don't know what is.

Student: About how big is that church?

BB: Oh, it's small compared to St. John's in Lawrence, but it can hold a lot of people.

Student: Did the stain glass depicting her life follow a sequence?

BB: Yes.

Student: Was it biographical? Life in France all the way to the end?

BB: Oh, no. No church is that big.

Student: I didn't think so.

BB: It starts with her landing with her nuns in New Orleans after a hair raising journey across the Atlantic in which they were pursued by pirates who after all did not bother them. They got to New Orleans. They had been invited by the first bishop of the Louisiana Territory. He must've forgotten they were coming or something. No preparations up here had been made. They were almost a year living with the Ursulines in New Orleans before they came up the Mississippi. They were given a house in no where that became St. Charles, Missouri and that's where their missionary activities began.

Student: So, no one was there to meet Philippine –

BB: Oh, some townspeople knew they were coming. The bishop may have been there but I don't think he was. That question I wasn't prepared for.

I'll tell you what, though. They got a mortgage for which they weren't able to pay.

Student: That I didn't know. Was this for the house in St. Charles?

BB: Yes. He was very good at that. This was Bishop Du Bourg, who was the bishop of the entire Louisiana Territory and Florida.

Student: I was under the impression Florida was still Spanish at this point and not part of America.

BB: Yes, I think so. It was Spanish. But they had to have clergy.

I'm not up on that either.

Student: I digress.

Despite coming from France and spending much of her time in other parts of the country...

BB: Well, specifically Missouri. She made trips up and down the Mississippi to found convents, schools for girls, at great sacrifice to herself. She was 49 years old when she first came to North America. She got awfully sick in these places. She got cholera.

Student: Was it cholera on the way over?

BB: No, I think it was yellow fever on the way over. She was terribly sick, everyone was. I mean it took the best part of a month to cross the Atlantic in those days.

Student: To finish my question, why do you think she's often remembered as a Kansas saint rather than say a Missouri saint?

BB: Well, actually, she isn't one or the other. Kansas was part of Missouri at this point. They were talking about sainthood because issues such as race, slavery, were showing their ugly heads. That was to have great repercussion pretty soon. I don't know John Brown's dates, but all that was going to happen. You had conflict that early. I don't know if they were doing any shooting.

Student: The tension was still there.

BB: Right.

Student: You mentioned Philippine came to America when she was considerably older by the standards of the time. Why do you think it took so long to realize her dream, her determination to do missionary work?

BB: She was sent here by Du Bourg who petitioned to have her colony of nuns to come over here. She knew she expected to teach Indians, and so did her order, but they didn't send her to Indians. They sent her to the St. Louis area. They didn't intend her to be in St. Charles, they intended her to be in St. Louis, but there was no property. These were very small places and the way of life was kind of primitive.

Student: It seems to me, when she first arrived, instead of teaching she seemed to be spending a lot of time in administrative duties.

BB: Yes, she was the superior of her order here.

Student: Of course, we can't read her mind, but do you think she considered that a burden or a hindrance to her ambitions?

BB: She didn't want to be praised for it, let's say. She didn't want to be noted as a great administrator. She didn't want praise or recognition; she simply wanted the job to get done. But yes, she was the superior, and that's the person who does the administration.

It must've been a hot potato because it was very hard to get pupils, they were live in pupils. She had trouble collecting their fees. Part of the philosophy of her order was teaching the poor. She had poor pupils, but to her credit, she founded the first school for black kids, west of the Mississippi.

Student: Right, the first free school. Was that in Florissant?

BB: No, she started in St. Charles and finished in Florissant.

Have you read this book?

Student: I've read chapters from it. I accessed it at Spencer.

BB: Well, it's yours. Free.

Student: You sure? Thanks, this will be a big help. Great.

Speaking of this biography, I was reading translations of her journal entries and correspondences, she seems constantly frustrated by what she perceives to be her failures whether it's administratively, raising the funds for the children, or not being able to teach and live where she wants. I guess what I'm trying to say is –

BB: She saw herself as a failure. She understood herself as a failure. This is probably true in many ways, but it's also a characteristic of religious mystics. They think they're the worst person in the world, and that's part of religious humility exaggerated though it may be. That isn't just her realization that she wasn't getting the job done, the circumstances wouldn't let her get the job done.

Student: Would say that's characteristic of religious orders in general or more specific to the Sacred Heart?

BB: Well, no, I don't think it has anything to do with being in a religious order. I think it is something any person exposed to these conditions while trying to do something that has a spiritual orientation, I think they all feel like that. Unless they get into extraordinarily beneficial surroundings in which case they wouldn't be there in the first place.

Student: True. What can you tell me about the canonization process in the Catholic Church?

BB: I can't tell you much because I've never been that close to the engine. The first thing that happens in they appoint a postulator and the cause, all the circumstances of the person's life, are thoroughly examined. It takes years. Also, it's expensive. They have to pay people for their time, for example, if they want medical opinions and things like that. It's expensive. It isn't just a thing of spiritual significance. The whole thing is ultimately conducted in Rome.

They even have a devil's advocate, they don't any more, but they have to examine the negative side of these things because they don't want to be bestowing these accolades on the lives of these people who shouldn't have that. You never can tell what the public doesn't know about some figure. They have had reprobates who've turned over a new leaf and become saints. Mary Magdalene, or so tradition says, there's nothing in scripture that says she's the prostitute of the New Testament stories. Did I answer your question?

Student: Yes. You mentioned it's often very expensive, how are those funds typically raised?

BB: I don't know that. I do know the money for Philippine's canonization came from places where her order has been established for a long time, typically South America. When she was canonized from their schools from all over the world came for that wearing their national costumes. It was very interesting. I thought the Japanese were very handsome.

Student: Who first initiated her campaign for sainthood?

BB: That is something I really don't know. Archbishop May of St. Louis, who is now deceased, is the one who pushed hardest and is the authority behind the bid for canonization. He was the person in charge of the proceedings that followed the announcement there would be a canonization. I never dealt with Archbishop May, but I wrote him a letter once and offered my services. If I could help at all with the arrangements after this had been scheduled. I really didn't have anything to do with that. There was a Monseigneur Wilkinson in the St. Louis area. He was Archbishop May's representative. It was a very strange situation because when we were on the way, on chartered flights, the pope excommunicated Archbishop Lefebvre who was a separatist. He ordained his own bishops and you can't do that. He had set up a North American headquarters in Saint Mary's near Topeka and established a college there and everything. It was the sight of the old Indian reservations, Pottawatomie place, where they still are. They were moved from Lynn County to St. Mary's.

Student: That would have been after Philippine passed away, correct?

BB: Well, she wasn't here at the time. I don't know the date. But her party of nuns was involved in that. They never left, they're buried down there in Mt. Calvary Cemetery. I think four of them are buried down there. It's a beautiful place on top of a hill full of cedar trees. It has a sweeping view of the countryside around Topeka.

Student: About what year was this Lefebvre was excommunicated?

BB: It was the same week as the canonization which was July 1988. I think he did that on July 2nd, the previous pope. He looked terrible at the canonization ceremony. He looked ill. He was. They said he was terribly upset.

Student: You mentioned you wrote a letter to Archbishop May, was that the beginning of your involvement?

BB: No, that was after the canonization had been announced. I simply offered my services. But Wilkerson did contact me. I was asked to contact other people which I had done anyway.

Student: How would you describe your participation?

BB: It was mostly publicity. Philippine was totally unknown around Kansas. The news was not entirely welcome. This is not exactly Catholic territory. You have to remember, in the old days, they had the Ku Klux Klan down here and we were one of the Ks. Now we have something else but I won't get into that.

I made a lot of contacts and went to places I normally wouldn't have gone. Wrote a lot of letters but don't ask to see them. I didn't keep them. I can barely balance my checkbook. I did spend a lot of money.

Student: Were you writing primarily to gather funds and support?

BB: Support. I didn't ask anyone for money.

Student: Who were you writing to primarily? Parishioners in the area?

BB: Priests mostly. To drum up interest and remind them that this happened here. There was some interest in pursuing the matter. I tried contacting her order but I haven't been in touch with them for forty years or so. The person I spoke to who is now deceased wasn't a bit interested. "She was a failure," she said. They had given up, they really had. I wrote to one of the Kennedy's, but not interested. I had met this person, but no way.

Student: The religious of the Sacred Heart?

BB: No, the Kennedy. I don't want to identify anybody. I thought I'd get some support but they probably thought I was after their money. The person didn't even reply, I got a letter from his or her secretary.

Student: Thank you your interest in so and so?

BB: Yeah, pretty much! We'll call IF!

Student: I had read about how the order of the Sacred Heart had backed off on the canonization efforts.

BB: They had tried and it just seemed impossible. I got a taste of that when I tried for publicity in Kansas because there was just no interest in that. One place I went to talking about the history of it asked me if I had seen their revised railway station. So, that's where you get!

When the story broke in Newsweek magazine, the fact there would be a canonization had been leaked to a very prominent editor who worked for Newsweek. He scooped it. That's when the real phone calls started.

BB: Yes. Not anymore, though they won't. Newsweek has just gone into partnership. What's the name of... Mad Dog or something like that on the television?

Student: I'm not sure.

BB: I don't follow any of that, I watch CNN. But there is a political news show, that's the wrong name.

Student: A radio show?

BB: Television, I think. It's announced today. I'll be embarrassed when I found out the correct name.

Student: I hadn't heard that. Do you know about when the canonization process was picked up again and by whom since the Sacred Heart found it impossible?

BB: It didn't come from them. I don't know exactly what was going on in the rest of the country but I know ever since that episode I had at the KU medical center I had been on the stick. I don't know what, if anything, the results of that were. I had no inkling there was any interest here. There was locally. The people in Lynn County had never forgotten Mother Duchesne. There was that window in the St. Lawrence center which was constructed before anyone knew there would be a canonization.

Student: Was that building constructed in the 60s?

BB: Later. 80s, I think. There's a cornerstone. But by the time they consecrated that, I think they knew there was going to be a canonization. See, the canonization was 1988.

Student: And I think the beatification was 1940.

BB: Mhm, 1940.

Student: Do you know what miracles were reported to support her canonization?

BB: I do vaguely. I knew by name and everything at one point. There was a man with cirrhosis of the liver in South America some place and he was cured. That was the inspiration for the beatification. Somebody had else had cancer of the throat and was cured. Somebody else had cancer someplace else. She had already had two miracles, long ago. They could've canonized her but didn't.

Student: I couldn't find any information on miracles associated with her. Do you know about these earlier miracles?

BB: I know they were physical things. The first one, that man with cirrhosis of the liver, was why she was beatified. Then, there were two female cases. The most recent one that led to the canonization was one of their own nuns, I believe she was French, and she went to San Francisco. I think she had already been diagnosed, was examined in San Francisco, and they said it was incurable. She went back for another examination, and it

was gone, which is impossible. Those things are always rather amazing and don't always happen over night. I'm making a fool of myself over this. I should know. Once upon a time I did know.

Student: Going to Philippine's life, towards the end of her years in retirement, there was a time where she ceased corresponding with Sophie Barat in France. What do you think led to that or explains that?

BB: I checked on that a little while ago. In the first place, Madeleine Sophie was having terrible trouble of an administrative nature. Those people had lived through the French Revolution and the Napoleonic follow up. She had to hold her order together against anti-clerical laws. Also, against strong minds within her own order that had different views on how things should be done. That can be very difficult. There was that sort of this at home for Madeleine Sophie, but also, specifically regarding Philippine, Philippine didn't get the letters. Madeleine Sophie had been too busy to write. Philippine thought she had done something. She really grieved over this. Finally, someone told Madeleine Sophie what was going on with Philippine and she hastened to rectify that, even sending someone related to Philippine over.

Student: Carrying the letter, right?

BB: I don't know if she brought the letter with her, but she was sent over as a gesture of caring. The physical conditions for conducting mail were horrible. A lot of the mail that was sent never reached its destination. We don't know what letters may have been lost, not unless someone wrote to you and we have this statement. They did a lot of letter writing and it was an art then that education was greatly concerned with. That was the ordinary means of communication. Writing a letter is also creative. You had to learn how to do it properly.

There was a woman here in Lawrence whose name was Duchesne who is deceased now. She believed she was related to Philippine. There were a lot of letters from this woman's family and I was allowed to read them. Reading French handwriting from the early 19th century and in bad condition, it was awful. We tried to get these letters for the Spencer Research Library, but that didn't happen. Her father had kept these letters in a book. And of course, if letters are treated like that, they crumble the same way a book will. The odd thing was, when Wilma died, she died on Philippine's feast. She died at the same time as Philippine died. She probably didn't know this was happening to her.

Student: That's pretty amazing.

BB: Let's see, I wanted to ask you a question.

Student: Was it in relation to my question about their correspondence?

BB: No, but something collateral to that.

Student: Going back to that, an explanation I heard was that when Philippine retired, the superior who took her was intentionally keeping Sophie's responses from her.

BB: Oh, no. That was Mother Galitzin who was sent over as the supervisor to make sure everything was working. She had heard from other people that Philippine was going down. There were no amenities here, and by that time, she was in her seventies and infirm in the first place. She had in mind to send Philippine back to St. Louis. That's what finally happened. She wasn't mean, she was just one of these people who was too strict. She took the rules and the nitty gritty above human relations. She had no empathy for people. Philippine would've loved to die here. That didn't happen.

Oh, I wanted to ask you. You were talking to someone you said about that rift between Madeleine Sophie and Philippine, who was it?

Student: Oh no, I had read about it. I read about it in another biography by Catherine Mooney.

BB: Oh, yes, I have that book. That's a modern book with a piece of modern art on it. The man who did that art is responsible for the design of the basilica at her old school which is still there. It was closed at one point and reopened at another point, but it claims 1818. This man, I can't think of his name, but very well known architect. He painted and was an architect. It's only half a church they didn't have the money to finish it. There's talk of finishing it now. Her remains are in a rose marble tomb and there's really nothing there except a little bones. Something like what happened to Cardinal Newman, there's nothing left. When they went to beatify him they found a little hair, and that was it.

Student: You said the building is half a church. Structurally it's incomplete?

BB: Yes, it's long and only half of what it's supposed to be. They made it very austere. The art and design. Everything in it is very modern. It caught the mood of the woman – she was austere. They've made the site of the old Pottawatomie reservation a park. There was a man, very prominent in this area, Bob White. He mustered a bunch of people and raised the funding. They cleared the land that had been somebody's farm and turned it into a park and put a big altar there. There's a pergola and bathrooms and parking lot. They've done a very nice job of it.

Student: An outdoor altar?

BB: Oh, yeah. There's no indoor to this. What used to be the reservation. Pottawatomie people do go down there. I have been down there with Indians. The Jesuits who were originally in charge burned all the buildings because they feared vandalism. It was all burnt before they took up residence down in St. Mary's. St. Mary's is interesting. The cemetery has a circle of graves of the early Jesuits. They are moss graves, you can hardly read the tombstones. It says something or other Irishman. Something or other German.

Student: Do any Pottawatomie live in that area where the old reservation used to be?

BB: No. You couldn't live there. The land is given to floods and mud. The mud is awful, in fact, the nuns wore sabot down there to go outside and carry water and things like that. The government picked it out, they didn't. They were death marched down here it was terrible.

Student: And it wasn't the first relocation, correct? They were originally from Canada, I think around Ottawa.

BB: They were Canadian. Most of them that I know have French names. Not all, but many. They pronounce them in English. The Jesuits who ran the place down in Lynn County were Belgians, French speaking Belgians. Not father De Smet, he didn't come into Kansas. A lot of people think this was his venture, it wasn't. This is a biography of Father De Smet by John Killoran who had a lot of trouble getting it published. A lot of these things, including the book you have now, are written from a religious point of view. Academic publishers don't want that. He finally got it published.

Student: He was involved in the Rocky Mountain area, wasn't he?

BB: Oh, yes, and Mother Duchesne wanted so badly to go on to the Rocky Mountains.

Student: I had read that. All at the age of 71, she still wanted that.

BB: Did you know her feast day is this week?

Student: I did not.

BB: It's Thursday, the 18th of November. They have a ceremony every year started by the present archbishop. They give somebody who has done something, especially teaching, for the Church, they get an award. They get a speech.

Student: A little recognition.

BB: Yes, yes. I got that a couple years ago.

Student: Going back to Father De Smet briefly, the Pottawatomie mission, as you said, was not his project and so he was not there, correct?

BB: That's right. He never came into Kansas, though he wanted to. Those people were limited by the seasons. They could only do so much. You can't come down here in the winter. And the summer isn't so much better.

Student: Why do you think he was so insistent Philippine take part if it wasn't his project?

BB: Oh, she wanted it so badly! Look, she had come across the Atlantic Ocean at 50 years of age to do that. So why didn't they let her do it? It was administrative. They couldn't get their act together. That Du Bourg, he knew that's what she wanted to do and he wouldn't let her do it. He wanted all hands on deck in the St. Louis area. He's dreadful. He gave other people mortgages they couldn't pay. Put up the building and let them worry about it.

There's a statue of him on the grounds of St. Louis University. That's an interesting place, Robert Frost has a statue there too because he gave a lecture there once. The Jesuits were very instrumental in this area. They founded St. John's Church in Lawrence. But you know, the Civil War changed a lot of things. People withdrew, the religious orders did.

Student: Did they leave because –

BB: It was dangerous. Threats of fighting or whatever. I can't give you the date of departure but the nuns pulled out.

Student: From the major cities? Did they stay in the rural areas?

BB: No, it was the rural areas they had to get out of for their safety. There were other orders of women down here. There was an order of nuns south of Lynn County or maybe on the southern edge of the county. They had an establishment down there to take care of Indians. It wasn't Pottawatomie Indians, they had another tribe down there.

Student: Were they Carmelite nuns by any chance?

BB: No. Carmelites don't do that. They're cloistered and contemplative.

Student: A lot of people often say the lives of saints are no longer relevant or what we can learn from them in today's world is limited. How would you respond to that?

BB: Look what she did in this region when she was 50 years of age and later. And 50 would be 60 now. I read all kinds of stuff and some of the books that describe what's waiting for you in old age. I looked at one and to quote it, it says, "Aging sucks."

Student: That's an understatement.

BB: It certainly is! When you come across somebody who has done what she did as she got into her age it's amazing. It's amazing. She didn't just sit down when she retired – she was forced to retire. She kept on doing things from her chair in St. Charles. She prayed as much as time as they would let her. A lot of people think well what did she do? She founded girls' schools? I've heard nuns say that. It didn't seem challenging to them. Well, heck. Found girls' schools on the frontier where there's no money to support and there are a bunch of laws that stop you from doing it your way. My

goodness it's amazing what someone with spunk can do his or her remaining years. It's amazing.

Student: I would be surprised to hear nuns say that. You mentioned earlier one of the nuns of the Sacred Heart told you she was a failure.

BB: She was.

Student: In a lot of ways she was, but as you said, considering the context in which she worked, it really is remarkable.

BB: Well, we look at it that way, but did her contemporaries look at it that way? If you were running a chain of schools, how would you look at that? A little differently perhaps.

But being a saint isn't only what you did, it's what you are. This was a person totally dedicated to what her religion stands for, and it wasn't just the institutional Church. This woman was a believer and she lived that way. Let's say she was a mystic who did works but her relationship with the almighty was more important than founding schools. That's what enabled her to found schools on the frontier. Really remarkable. Still, a lot of Catholics never heard of her. You may as well face it, you go to California and start talking about Mother Duchesne, people won't know what you're talking about.

Student: I think that pretty much wraps it up. Was there anything else you wanted to discuss or like to say?

BB: No, I don't think so. I have a picture of myself at the canonization mass. That was the previous pope. People were selected by her order to receive communion by him because there was a Spanish priest canonized at the same mass. His name was Rojas. That's one name I remember. They have very strict rules too about things like that. He would only give it to you in your mouth. Nowadays you use your hands. You have to be dressed acceptably to them. You have to sleeves for example. No bare shoulders. No low cuts. No shorts. People, even as tourists, can't go into St. Peter's in shorts. If you have bare arms and slacks you get a paper cape to put on to cover your nakedness.

Student: Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

BB: Not at all. This is my favorite occupation except I don't get to do it very often.