illustrations into a narrative that is at the same time technical and general and should appeal to readers with all levels of expertise. The one additional section that the volume could use, however, is a bibliography. There are footnotes at the end of each chapter, but it is tedious to search each one for sources. The author does include as Appendix 2 a “Catalog of the Books, Addresses, and Professional Papers Written by Alexander Lyman Holley.”

McHugh has been associated with the American Iron and Steel Institute in several professional positions, and she displays a deep interest in and knowledge of her subject. Her book is good reading for anyone interested in the technological history of the nineteenth-century American steel industry and in its outstanding figures.

Colorado Historical Society

Judith Ann Heberling
Denver, Colorado


Since Vatican Council II there has been a growing awareness of the vanguard role played by religious women in American Catholicism, both past and present, and an accompanying awareness of the dearth of information available in general histories of the church in the United States published to date. Hence, On the Wing: The Story of the Pittsburgh Sisters of Mercy, by Sister M. Jerome McHale, R.S.M., is a welcome addition to American Catholic studies.

On the Wing chronicles the story of the Sisters of Mercy from the arrival in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1843 of Mother Frances Xavier Warde and six Irish sisters. The story of these women who accompanied Bishop Michael O’Connor, first bishop of the newly established Diocese of Pittsburgh, to establish the church in that “Western city” represents a microcosm of the nineteenth-century American church. It captures the vitality of the nascent church in portraying the pioneering courage of these Irish missionaries, their rugged journey to Western Pennsylvania, and the struggles to establish themselves in a city caught up in the rapid expansion of industrialization and permeated with the hostile nativist sentiments which characterized the urban centers of the Northeast in mid-century.

Throughout the five chapters of On the Wing, the reader becomes increasingly conscious of the leadership role of religious women in the
American church, and the sense of autonomy that evolved among
them. In an era long before conscious concern about the feminist move-
ment within the church, courageous superiors stood firm in resisting
hierarchical efforts to control the internal affairs of the congregations.
When Bishop Michael Domenec, O'Connor's successor in Pittsburgh,
sought to divide the Mercy community into two regions established
along geographical lines and with separate governments and mother-
houses, every sister in the congregation except one signed a petition
circulated by the mother superior to resist what Sister Jerome calls
the bishop's "usurpation of legal rights." The author carefully em-
phasizes that the respect for the legitimate authorities of the church
held by Mother Catherine McAuley, Mother Frances Warde, and
Mother Mechtilde did not prevent them from being quick to take
measures to guarantee the congregation's rights when bishops or
cardinals exercised authority which these women experienced as
oppressive or interfering. These early religious women in America
evoke such strong images of feminist leadership because their driving
motivation was service to people in the spirit of the Gospel, and they
pursued every avenue necessary to realize this goal.

A weakness in this study is excessive attention to detail of per-
sons and events. The reader is sometimes left with the feeling of
following characters in a Russian novel. In a text whose methodology
is more that of memoirs than rigorous historical analysis, however,
one can appreciate the author's dilemma in choosing which details to
omit without losing the richness of the story.

Sister M. Jerome McHale, author of On the Wing, is the
archivist of the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh and former chairperson
of the English department at Carlow College. The book is enhanced
by the fact that she has lived much of the history of which she writes.
As the first executive director of the Federation of the Sisters of
Mercy of the Americas in the 1960s, Sister Jerome came into contact
with Mercy communities throughout the United States, Canada,
Ireland, England, Australia, and New Zealand. The author's vast
knowledge and experience, her use of Sisters of Mercy archives
throughout the United States and Ireland, and her own keen Irish
wit and particular interpretation of events enliven On the Wing.

St. Vincent Seminary
Latrobe, Pennsylvania

Patricia McCann