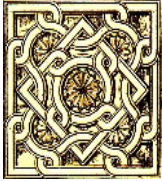


Secretum Meum Mihi



Volume 2, Number 4



December 2007



A Newsletter for Catholic Women

In Praise of Shared Beauty

I wonder when Radegund first conceived the idea of becoming a nun. Perhaps during her early childhood in her uncle's home, when she learned he killed her father?

Or, around the age of reason, after her family was decimated by the Franks, when she was carried off by Clothar to become his wife in training? Did she know then?

Perhaps she knew when Clothar's other wives bore children at the time of her marriage?

Or, more likely, ten years later, when Clothar murdered her only surviving brother?

She finally left him then, and sought to live as a religious in a villa that was part of her dower. Eventually, Archbishop Germanus of Paris had to intervene to keep Clothar from reclaiming his prized "possession."

When he finally died in 561, Radegund was able to establish a monastery in Poitiers with ample funds from Clothar's desire for absolution prior to departing this life. She dedicated the rest of her life to providing a haven for women like herself who had been abused by the violence of the era.

(Continued on page two)

ST. RADEGUND AND ST. VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS

Feature Essay: Page 1
In Praise of Shared Beauty

Interview: Page 3
Barbara Erakko Taylor:
Weaving Prayer into Life

Scripture Study: Page 5
Like a Child Quieted at the Breast

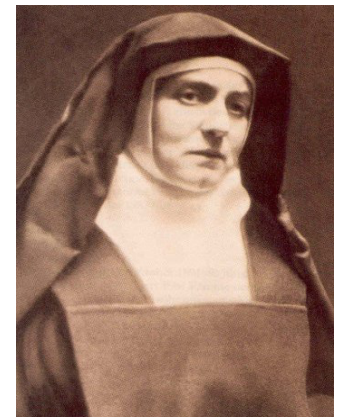
Prayer Intentions: Page 6
For Women in Prison

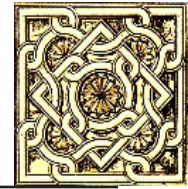
Historical Sketch: Page 7
Poetic Beauty and Devout Souls,
by Sandra Miesel

Book Review: Page 9
The Age of Innocence, by Edith Wharton

Secretum Meum Mihi means "My secret is mine"

Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta) was a Jew who became Catholic in 1922 after reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. When asked why she converted, she wrote, "secretum meum mihi." She became a Carmelite in 1934, but perished in Auschwitz. Her feast is August 9.





Venantius Fortunatus arrived on the scene in Poitiers and began a friendship with Radegund and her spiritual sister Agnes that lasted two decades. Their shared love of poetry and beauty was healing to both. Venantius abandoned his troubadour lifestyle, and settled there, dedicated to showering his beloved with poetry that survived the murderous age in which they lived.

It may seem odd to highlight a pair like Fortunatus and Radegund at Christmas. Even the hymns that Fortunatus is famous for honor the Holy Cross, and seem more appropriate for Lent.

But there are many who are not surrounded by a large and loving Christian family, and whose friends provide needed succor and strength all through the year. The beauty of friendship is a gift worthy of the Magi, who hoped to be counted among the friends of the newborn King.

Especially for women who may have endured violent and humiliating treatment at the hands of the Clothars of the world, I propose a toast this Christmas to all those men who bring forth beauty in the lives of women, and honor their accomplishments so that history will not forget about them.



To the Lady Radegunde with a Bunch of Flowers

O Queen, that art so high
Purple and gold thou passest by,
With these poor flowers thy lover
 worships thee.
Though all thy wealth thou hast
 flung far from thee,
Wilt thou not hold
The violet's purple and the crocus' gold?

Take this poor offering,
For it thy thoughts shall bring
To that blest light that is to
 dawn for thee,
Fields bright as these,
And richer fragrances.

And when thou comest there,
Hear, O my Saint, my prayer,
And may thy kind hand draw
 me after thee.

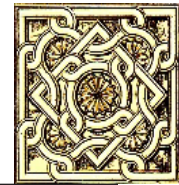
Yet, thou thine eyes
Already look on flowers of paradise,
These thine own flowers
Would have thee out of doors.
Yea, thou the flowers of paradise
 are sweet,
These fain would lie
Where thou wert passing by.

(reprinted from Helen Waddell's out of print but lovely translation of Venantius Fortunatus found in Medieval Latin Lyrics.)

There are so many little ways to weave beauty into our lives and friendships! Have a beautiful Christmas!

Peace be with you,

Kristen



Kristen West McGuire interviews Barbara Erakko Taylor on Weaving Prayer into Life

(Barbara Erakko Taylor designed an information system for the White House Executive Office and several Federal and Fortune 500 companies before gradually embracing a solitary lifestyle of silence and contemplation. Now the owner of Peace and Prayer Gifts in Hannibal, Missouri, she weaves prayer shawls and sells spirituality items made by women in fragile circumstances.)

Kristen: When you look back over your spiritual journey, what event was most important to you?

Barbara: Oh, my initial conversion experience is the most important part! I was raised by an atheist father, with a Lutheran mother who didn't go to church *gkvjgt.vq"mgrp"fcf"jerr{0"K"fkf"igv"eqpŁt o gf"qpg"* Sunday; but the next Sunday, I got up and got ready for church and everybody was sleeping. That was that. I became comfortable as a vague agnostic.

Later, when my girls were young, I knew a retired Methodist minister dying of a lung disease. So, I was walking, thinking about him, wondering how long he would linger, and I heard this voice say, "February 20th." This was in October, but I went in and wrote it down.

Barbara Erakko Taylor making a necklace with shawls in the background.

© 2007 Pam Taylor



Cpf"vjgp"chtkgpf"qh"okpg"cumgf"og"vq"Ł{"vq"Dquvqp" to be a consultant while she had back surgery *qp"Hgdtwct{"43uv0"K"fkfp0v"ycpv"vq"Ł{"cpf"vjgp"* wondered why I was fearful – strange why I would be that way. I was really anxious and unnerved.

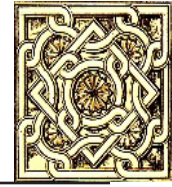
Well, he did die on the 20th. I was hysterical. I consulted my spiritual director at the time, because I was in so much pain about this. And she said, "Well, what does your prayer say?" and my prayer said, "Trust your prayer." But I believed I was going to die. I said to God, "I guess you want my life for *uqogvjkipi00"Cpf"K"Łgy"vq"Dquvqp.cpf"kv"ycu"Łpg0"* But, when I got to the hotel, there was a message from my friend, whose brother had died that day in a mid-air collision.

And that was my conversion experience. I believed that there was a God somewhere somehow trying to touch me, and that all these intuitions were real and I could have faith in him. It was not an intellectual thing, but a conversion of the heart.

Kristen: Wow! That's quite a story!

Barbara: I really think as a child, I had a strong spiritual path.

(more on page four)



Kristen: You were a wife and mother, and discovered meditation then.

Barbara: Yes. (pause) I was more of a spirit mother than an earth mother. The earth moms, their feet are fully grounded-- they get the meals on the table. The spirit mom can look into that inner essence of the person. I was that kind of mom. My meditation grew and grew in those years.

Kristen: You've written two books about silence and solitude. I wasn't sure you would talk in the interview. (laughs)

Barbara: (laughs) Really, I think that stage of my life was a time and place to heal and grow after my marriage ended. I needed a secure nest. The healing happened in the silence and the prayer. But the *ctvkuvke"ukfg"qh" o g" hqwpf" vjg" jquwug"vqq"eqpLpkpi!* The little bird couldn't spread his wings.

Kristen: So, you are not in solitude any longer?

Barbara: No, not in that way. I eventually felt called out of the deliberate solitary life and more to service. I went on a Visionquest in Colorado. You had to fast for three days and four nights alone with your plastic tarp and a sleeping bag. It was a real shifting of my consciousness. At the end, we all shared our stories, and the medicine names that we discerned. I thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to try to weave their sacred names into an altar cloth?" So I tried it when I got home.

Kristen: And that's how the prayer shawl ministry started for you?

Barbara: Right. It was a natural leap from there to *rtc{"kpvq"vjg"ygcxkpiu!"Cv"o {"Ltuv"ujqy."c"yqocp"* walked right into my booth and said, "This is mine!" So, I told her to look at the prayer card to see what I had been praying during the weaving and she burst into tears. "When I was in intensive care recently, your prayer here is the one that I was saying!"

VISIT PEACE AND PRAYER
GIFTS ONLINE:

<http://peaceandprayergifts.com/>

Kristen: What does the prayer shawl do for the wearer?

Barbara: It's like a portable tabernacle to wrap yourself in, to create sacred space. Have you ever heard the story about Susanna Wesley, mother of John Wesley? [ed. note: founder of the Methodist church.] When the kids overwhelmed her, she would throw her skirt over her head to escape. You know— we all need sacred time and space.

Kristen: When you work on commission, what do you pray into the weaving?

Barbara: I ask the person, "At this point in your sacred journey, what do you want to wrap yourself in? What color is this for you? (Let *it* tell you!) and What prayer do you want? And the answers to those questions just get me started. It's amazing what happens in the weaving.

A neighbor asked me to create one for his wife, and I had a lot of tangled threads when I worked on it. So, I mentioned to the wife when I gave it to her that I had had to do lots of untangling as I wove. She burst into tears and told me later that she cried for days. It turned out that she had been all tangled up about leaving her husband, but that now they had some deep conversations and she would stay. That husband was so intuitive and he sensed the right thing to do.

Barbara's Favorite Prayer:

When Barbara sets up the warp threads for a shawl, she prays the same four line prayer over and over to help her count the lines and to enter into prayer:

I hold the light of Christ within

I am the light of Christ within

I give the light of Christ within

You are the light of Christ.



Bible Study: Like a Child Quieted at the Breast Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents
Of David.

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high; I do not
occupy myself with things too great and too
marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like
a child quieted at its mother's breast; like
a child that is quieted is my soul.

O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time
forth and forevermore.

Context: The book of Psalms is actually
a collection of several smaller "songbooks"
of ancient Israel. Psalm 131 is part of a
collection known as the "Songs of Ascents"
which were likely sung by pilgrims headed
to Jerusalem to the Temple. The Temple
site itself was located on Mount Moriah,
and the city was surrounded by the Judean
hills on three sides.

Translation: Although it is traditional
to assume that King David composed
the Psalms, scholars cannot confirm that
conclusively. This particular collection of
songs were probably dated later, perhaps even
after the Babylonian exile and rebuilding of
the Temple. The last line appears to be a
"liturgical" addition.

*The Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible,
copyright 1965, 1966 by the Division of Christian Education of the
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of
America. Used by permission. All rights reserved*

Vocabulary:

lifted up: Other translations of this word
are haughty, and with the next line, even
arrogant. The humility of the pilgrim is
childlike, looking for direction.

quieted: also translated frequently as
"weaned", the original Hebrew *gamal*
connotes a ripening or benefit. The psalmist
plays off the quiet receptivity of the child
secure on its mother's lap with the anxiety
of making a pilgrimage.

Anyone who has traveled with children in
tow can appreciate the beauty of this Psalm
during the holiday rush to reunite across the
miles. Humbling ourselves en route is even
an imitation of our Lady, who arrived in
Bethlehem in peasant style.

Even if we expect no pilgrimage this
Christmas, the Christ Child will make His
appearance to all souls. If we receive Him,
the infant Jesus resides with us and we
carry Him wherever we go, including to the
Temple. Can you trust your own ability to
provide for the life of Christ within? Trust
in the Lord! He shall indeed provide!

Discussion Questions:

1. Every adult has had the childhood
experience of condescension. Sometimes, we
also experience that humiliation as adults.
How do you react to being treated as a
child? Why?

2. The quiet soul of the child on his mother's
lap is a beautiful image of Christmas.
Find your favorite from among this year's
cards, and imagine yourself on Mary's lap
alongside baby Jesus. What might happen if
you joined their idyllic repose regularly?



Prayer Intentions: Pray for Women in Prison

The drive to build relationships that all women experience can be deeply misguided or manipulated by others. Women in prison are often victims themselves, even if the cause is centered in self-destructive behavior. Until relatively recently, women who were caught in webs of family violence often received paltry mercy.

No matter what one might have done to end up in prison, the child of the prisoner is surely the loser in all cases, deprived of the income and attention of one parent, and sometimes both. Over half of the women in prison are mothers.

So many good ministries exist to help women in prison and their afflicted children. Consider a generous gift this year in honor of the little infant who came to set us all free.

The **Angel Tree Foundation** gives gifts to children while parents are incarcerated. A ministry of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship, the group tries to foster ties with local churches for inmates after release as well.

www.angeltree.org

Women's Prison Association is a service and advocacy organization committed to helping women with criminal justice histories realize new possibilities for themselves and their families.

www.wpa.org

Amity Foundation is a non-profit corporation dedicated to rehabilitate and restore personal dignity to the lives of substance abusers such as, addicted mothers and their children, homeless substance abusers, victims of violence, children at high risk of becoming addicted, criminal gang members and incarcerated substance abusers.

<http://www.amityfoundation.com/>

Lamp Ministries is an active prison ministry run by Deacon Joe Campbell in Michigan. Many of their ideas are being replicated in other dioceses around the country. Joe says, "We have remarkable faith building experiences at almost everyone one of our Catholic church services in the jail. We are eager share the remarkable signs and wonders of the Lord through our eNewsletter. Visit www.lampministries.net

Lord, let us pray:

- * for the complete repentance of those whose crimes have landed them in prison;
- * for women to be liberated from webs of violence and instability caused by substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty;
- * for the children of prisoners, that they might find encouragement and personal fortitude and loving support;
- * for incarcerated women to find assistance and training to imagine a better life after their release from prison, for the sake of their children;
- * for those persons unaffected by violence, that they would pray for the suffering victims of all forms of violence and directly support those who take action to help;
- * for the many organizations and individuals who visit those in prison, that their efforts would have rich spiritual and temporal rewards; and
- * for those who knowingly or unknowingly cause vulnerable women to become entangled in illegal activities, that they might be enlightened and repent.

Amen.



Historical Sketch: Poetic Beauty and Devout Souls

by Sandra Miesel

Fortunatus and Radegund met in what had been Roman Gaul and was in that day the Kingdom of the Franks. The Frankish invaders had been nominally Catholic since the baptism of their king, Clovis, in 496. But Christianity had little impact on the behavior of Clovis and his descendents, the feud-prone, polygamous and bloodthirsty Merovingian dynasty.

Radegund, a Thuringian princess, was born into a troubled family around 520. After murdering her father for the throne, Radegund's uncle took the young girl and her brother into his household. But the uncle was attacked and killed by the Franks in 531 in revenge for slaughtering Frankish hostages.

Although Radegund was still a child, she enthralled the victorious Frankish king, Clothar. He cast lots with his brother and won her as part of his booty. Clothar sent Radegund to a royal manor to grow up so he could make her his queen.

Radegund became a Catholic, and was given a good education based on the Church Fathers. Although she tried to escape, she was married to Clothar in 540, fifth of perhaps seven wives, some of whom were still living. But, for the duration of the marriage, Radegund was the principal queen.

Radegund gamely fulfilled her state duties, trying to temper her husband's brutality with generous almsgiving and intercession for royal prisoners. She tended the poor and sick with her own hands, ate humble fare at banquets, and secretly wore a hairshirt under her royal robes during Lent. "More Christ's partner than her husband's companion," (as Fortunatus would later write) she would slip out of Clothar's bed whenever possible to pray, much to the king's irritation.

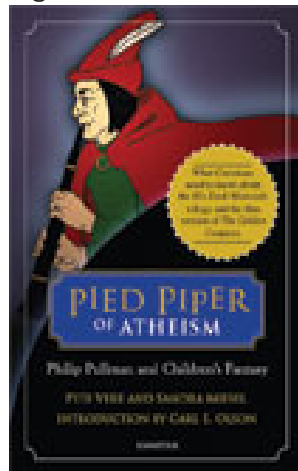
After a decade or so of childless marriage, Clothar murdered Radegund's younger brother while she was away from the palace. The grief-stricken queen fled to Saint Medard, the bishop of Noyon, and demanded to be made a nun. Manhandled by royal supporters, the bishop hesitated. Frankish law forbade a woman to take religious vows without her husband's permission. When Radegund clothed herself in monastic garb anyway, the bishop yielded.

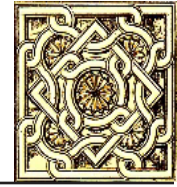
Radegund retired to a royal manor that Clothar had given her. Consumed by zeal for doing good, she gave away her royal regalia and threw herself into the service of the needy even more vigorously than before. After awhile, Clothar wanted his wife back. He may have planned to recapture her by force.

After some confusing maneuvers, Clothar and Radegund reached an accommodation negotiated by Saint Germanus, Bishop of Paris. The king released Radegund, endowed a monastery for her at Poitiers, and begged her pardon. Radegund forgave Clothar and may have promised to do penance for his sins in that her mortifications became far more drastic after this point.

Sandra Miesel has a new book available.
Order at 800-651-1531
or online: www.ignatius.com!

The Golden Compass is a movie aimed at children based on a trilogy by Philip Pullman. Mrs. Miesel's new book, *Pied Piper of Atheism*, explains why you DON'T wish to take your child to see it.





Clothar—who would die soon—had much to repent of, including orders to burn a rebellious son alive with his whole family.

Germanus blessed Radegund's new monastery of the Virgin Mary and professed her nuns. But the former queen remained canonically a deaconess and declined the post of abbess, giving that office to her foster-daughter, Agnes.

Radegund led the community in the fervor of her vigils, the humility of her service, and the rigor of her austerities. When not reading the scriptures, she had them read to her. She bathed the sick, scrubbed vegetables, cleaned privies and wore sackcloth—"generous to all, but stingy with herself."

Into this sealed garden of sanctity wandered Venantius Fortunatus, an exquisitely refined Italian with a gift for poetry and fine living. He was born in Trieste in 530 and educated at Ravenna, cities still part of the Eastern Roman Empire. The terrible Gothic Wars ravaging the rest of Italy somehow never touched his life.

Sometime in the 560s, Fortunatus embarked on a very leisurely pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Martin of Tours to thank the saint for healing his eyes. A man excessively eager to please, Fortunatus left a trail of pretty poems wherever he quested.

After reaching Tours, Fortunatus went on to nearby Poitiers and saw Radegund. Even in middle age, she entranced him as she had King Clothar 30 years earlier. "Her influence fell upon him like a consecration," says medievalist Helen Waddell.

Fortunatus took holy orders, and settled down as the confessor and steward of Radegund's monastery. He sent Radegund gentle love-poems and bouquets (see example on page 2) He declared that her poems in response "restored honey to the wax tablets they were written on." More cozily, Radegund urged him to eat more eggs and the abbess Agnes made him cheese with her own hands.

But the level-headed Radegund was too dedicated to her Heavenly Spouse to be take Fortunatus' attentions as anything but honorable friendship. And life at Poitiers was scarcely the idyll it at first appeared.

War raged around it as Clothar's sons fought for the kingdom, two of them incited by their feuding wives. Radegund wrote all parties urging peace and tried to be a mediator. Her impact was temporary at best. But Radegund was determined to protect her ark of refuge and her family in Christ. Besides prayer and penance, she collected relics as supernatural defenses. She sent to Constantinople for a fragment of the true cross, accompanied by a heart-rending letter to her surviving cousin who had fled there years earlier.

Scholars are divided on whether Radegund, Fortunatus or the two in collaboration wrote this poetic letter, but it weeps a lifetime of loneliness. And, by the time it reached Constantinople, Radegund's cousin was dead.

When the precious relic of the true cross arrived, in 569, Fortunatus wrote the glorious hymn *Vexilla regis* ("The banners of the king go forth") which would become the marching song of the Crusades, half a millennium hence. In another burst of inspiration, he added the *Pange lingua gloriosi* (Sing my tongue the Savior's triumph).

Radegund's monastery changed its name to Holy Cross. Twenty years passed before she died peacefully there on August 13, 587. Saint Gregory of Tours celebrated her funeral in place of the hostile local bishop.

Fortunatus wrote a *Life of Radegund*, emphasizing her mortifications and miracles so that future generations would remember his beloved as a saint. Confident that she would draw him after her into heaven, Fortunatus ended his days in 609 as Bishop of Poitiers.



Book Review: The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton

304 pages, (New York: Modern Library Classics, 1999), \$9.95

The First World War hurt everyone: rich and poor, old and young. Edith Wharton wrote her masterpiece after she helped countless orphans and widows to thrive in the desperate ruins in France. Small wonder that she would look back over her life after the war, and reminisce with great insight on her coming of age in New York's elite social circles in the 1870s.

In fact, Edith Wharton's maiden name was "Jones," of the idiom "keeping up with the Joneses." Much of her childhood was spent in Europe, and she settled in France permanently after her divorce from Teddy Wharton became official in 1913. The first female to win the Pulitzer prize for fiction, Wharton was a maverick novelist, exposing adultery, women's liberation and the hypocrisy of the social elites.

The novel opens at the opera, where Newland Archer is among those seeing and being seen. He is happily engaged to marry May Welland, a lovely young woman whose life and family are perfect for a man of his station in life. When May's questionable cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, joins her family's box, tongues begin to wag, Newland rushes to support her family's embrace of their black sheep. In the process of 'helping', he falls for the woman.

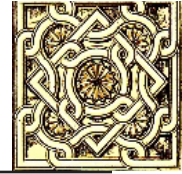
And to his horror, although he does not give in to his impulse to have a real affair with the countess, all of society assumes that he has already done so by the end of the book. The beauty that he glimpses in Ellen seems closed to him, as if it is simply not possible for him to share in so great a reward.

Wharton juxtaposes innocence and ignorance throughout the novel, and by the end, the "innocent" memories that Newland Archer held of the Countess have kept him in a prison of his own making. Certainly the social conventions of his class in upper crust society are in part to blame, and yet, those very rules also provided a stability that he needed. Wharton is critical of elite society, and yet she cannot reject its morals outright.

Wharton explores the anthropology of social customs, but she also digs deeper, to the very core of the question. Is man affected more by nature or by nurture? Part of the brilliance of this novel is that she does not answer the question for the reader. The surprising ending is not so much a denouement as a mirror, to which the reader must make a response.

Discussion Questions:

1. When Archer finally visits Paris after May's death, he wonders if the Countess views him "like a relic in a small dim chapel," a figment of imagination rather than reality. Are the regrets of youth more imagined than real? Are yours?
2. The unfettered and passionate beauty that Ellen Olenska came to represent for Newland Archer is contrasted with the boring, unimaginative beauty of his wife, May. Yet, when his son reveals to him that his wife understood the depth of his sacrifice in not following his true love, Archer discovers a depth to his life that surprises him. Beauty can only be united in truth and goodness, and despite the fears and intrigues of his social set, Archer had lived a beautiful life. Has beauty ever surprised you by sneaking into your life under the form of goodness or truth? How?
3. Which is more influential in life: nature or nurture? Is it possible to separate the two?



Take a coffee break with Jesus!

Secretum Meum Mihi

will be available FREE online by RSS Feed!



(Free articles will be emailed twice per week. Print and downloadable PDF copies are still available by subscription only.)

Visit www.MySecretisMine.com !

Secretum Meum Mihi Press

Kristen West McGuire
Founder/Editor in Chief

Editorial Advisory Board

Alexandra Burghardt
Meredith Gould
Genevieve Kineke
Beverly Mantyh
Margaret McGuire
Sandra Miesel

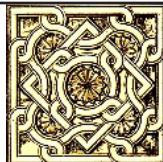
Secretum Meum Mihi is a monthly periodical dedicated to fostering the spirituality of Catholic women. Individual subscriptions are \$12.95/year for download, and \$24.95/yr for U.S. Mail delivery. (International mail delivery \$29.95). Parish subscriptions are \$119.95. Address all correspondence to the address below, or visit our website at:

www.MySecretisMine.com

Secretum Meum Mihi Press

P.O. Box 1501

Great Falls, MT 59403-1501



“The more lofty the degree of loving union to which God destines the soul, so much more and profound and persistent must be its purification.”

– Edith Stein,
in *Essays on Woman*,

Coming Next Month:
Saints Christina of MaryKate
and Geoffrey of Albans

Interview: Dr. Cynthia Jones-Nosacek, Pro-Woman & Pro-Life

Bible Study: A Woman with a Hemorrhage, by Martha Driscoll

Book Review: The Patron Saint of Liars, by Ann Patchett

Historical Sketch:
Converting One Lusty Cleric at a Time, by Sandra Miesel

Copyright permissions may be
directed to:
copyright@MySecretisMine.com